

Women and girls in war, conflict and disaster zones

- 4.1 This chapter discusses evidence presented on the violence and disadvantage women and girls experience during war, conflict and disasters. A number of submissions made reference to the particular circumstances of women and girls caught up in war and disaster zones: how they experienced these events; the dangers that they face, and what happens when they become displaced from their homes, regions or countries.
- 4.2 The chapter is divided into two sections – the first examines gender violence in war and conflict, and the second looks at disaster zones. The issues raised include:
- the particular vulnerability of women and girls in wars or disaster zones;
 - the lack of effectiveness of international conventions in war time;
 - the types of violence women and girls might experience;
 - women's lack of participation in peace processes;
 - the violence that refugee or displaced women and girls can face;
 - the particular forms of violence that arise out of disaster zones; and
 - the need for emergency responses to cater for women and girls.

War and conflict

- 4.3 Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in conflict zones. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) told the Committee:

It is well recognised that women have a particular experience of conflict, sometimes deliberately targeted, by virtue of their gender. This has a devastating impact on their lives both during and after the conflict.¹

- 4.4 The Australian Government recognises the disproportionate impact of war and conflict on women and girls. Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security states that the impact of conflict is 'highly gendered' and notes that targeted gender-based violence is a deliberate tactic in war:

Although often not engaged in combat, women and girls can be disproportionately affected by conflict. It has been estimated that up to 90 per cent of casualties in contemporary conflicts are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children ... There are many acts that constitute gender-based violence, including rape, sexual slavery, genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, abortion and sterilisation. These acts have particular significance in times of conflict and instability, as they are often used to achieve military or political objectives. The use of this type of violence is a violation of international human rights law and, in situations of armed conflict, international humanitarian law. It has a devastating effect on women, their families and their communities. This devastation can be long-lasting, extending far beyond the duration of the conflict.²

International prohibitions

- 4.5 Violence against women and girls in conflict has been the subject of recent international attention. In 2015 the United Nations General Assembly declared 19 June as the 'International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict'. General Assembly President Sam Kutesa observed that:

Rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict constitute grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

...

1 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Australia) (WILPF), *Submission 53*, p. 1.

2 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Exhibit 53: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018*, 2012, p. 6.

We should ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes and their superiors who condone their actions are held accountable and that victims get justice.³

- 4.6 The United States Department of State observed that efforts to highlight the issue of sexual violence and conflict ‘couldn’t come at a more critical time’. The Department wrote:

Sexual violence in conflict – against women, girls, men and boys – is a global scourge. Women and children are disproportionately affected by such violence and its use as a tactic of war often tears apart the social fabric that holds communities together.⁴

- 4.7 The United Nations (UN) has previously recognised the particular vulnerability of women and girls in conflict, notably in the adoption by the *UN Security Council of Resolution 1325* (UNSCR 1325) on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000.⁵ As the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has noted, UNSCR 1325 was ‘the first [Security Council] resolution to link women explicitly to the peace and security agenda.’⁶

- 4.8 The YWCA submission explained that:

Resolution 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.⁷

- 4.9 The Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect (the Asia Pacific Centre) further noted that the UN Security Council has now passed six further resolutions on women peace and security.⁸ These resolutions in summary are:

3 United Nations News Centre, *Adopting resolution, UN creates International Day against Sexual Violence in Conflict*, <www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51202#.Vbfg_mqqko> viewed 26 August 2015.

4 US Department of State, Official Blog, *A Day to Galvanize Action on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, <blogs.state.gov/comment/reply/22811?b8ee_name=ec730183c685d3423e3cadb736_form> viewed 27 August 2015.

5 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325 (2000), 31 October 2000 < [www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))> viewed 26 August 2015.

6 DFAT, *Annual Report, 2014–2015*, p. 118.

7 YWCA, *Submission 65*, p. 4.

8 Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect, *Submission 18*, p. 4.

- UNSCR 1820 (2008), which identifies ‘sexual violence as a tactic of war’ that requires appropriate specialised military and police responses;⁹
- UNSCR 1888 (2009), which ‘mandates that peacekeeping missions protect women and children from sexual violence during armed conflict’ and established a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict;¹⁰
- UNSCR 1889 (2009), which called for action to accelerate implementation of Resolution 1325, including a strategy to increase female participation in peace talks and ‘recognizing the particular needs of women and girls in post-conflict situations’;¹¹
- UNSCR 1960 (2010), which called for an end to sexual violence in armed conflict and parties in conflict to take action to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence;¹²
- UNSCR 2106 (2013), which reiterated that all actors, including the UN Security Council, parties to armed conflict, and all Member States and United Nations entities, must do more to combat impunity for conflict-related sexual violence;¹³ and
- UNSCR 2122 (2013), which affirms that ‘the enlistment of men and boys in the effort to combat all forms of violence against women are central to long-term efforts to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations’ and required the UN Security Council, UN Member States, and regional organisations work to dismantle barriers to enable women to participate in conflict resolution and recovery.¹⁴

4.10 DFAT explained that UNSCR resolution 2122 ‘puts in place a roadmap for a more systematic approach to the implementation of commitments on women, peace and security’.¹⁵

4.11 Measures associated with UNSCR 2122 include:

9 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1820 (2008), 19 June 2008, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1820\(2008\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1820(2008))> viewed 11 November 2015.

10 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1888 (2009), 30 September 2009, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1888\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1888(2009))> viewed 11 November 2015.

11 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1889 (2009), 5 October 2009, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889(2009))> viewed 11 November 2015.

12 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1960 (2010), 16 December 2010, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1960\(2010\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1960(2010))> viewed 11 November 2015.

13 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2106 (2013), 24 June 2013, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2106\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2106(2013))> viewed 11 November 2015.

14 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2122 (2013), 18 October 2013, <[www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2122(2013))> viewed 11 November 2015.

15 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 38.

- the development and deployment of technical expertise for peacekeeping missions and United Nations mediation teams supporting peace talks;
 - improved access to timely information and analysis on the impact of conflict on women and women's participation in conflict resolution reports and briefings to the [United Nations Security] Council; and
 - strengthened commitments to consult as well as include women directly in peace talks.¹⁶
- 4.12 The Asia Pacific Centre further noted that the United Nations 'Secretary General has issued yearly reports on implementation by the UN and Member States' of the major elements of UNSCR 1325 – 'prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery, and National Action Plans'.¹⁷
- 4.13 In June 2014 the British Foreign Secretary William Hague and Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie co-chaired the 'Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict'. The highly publicised Summit was attended by 1700 delegates and 123 country delegations including 79 Ministers. Australia's representatives included the former Chief of the Army Lieutenant General David Morrison and led by Australia's Global Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja.¹⁸ A 'statement of action' adopted by the Summit declared that 'rape and sexual violence is not an inevitable consequence of war or a lesser crime' and that 'prevention of sexual violence in conflict is critical to peace, security and sustainable development'.¹⁹ Further to this, the Foreign Minister, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, held a dialogue at Parliament House in Canberra with 'experts across government, non-government organisations and academia to discuss ways to address and respond to sexual violence' in conflict.²⁰
- 4.14 Reflecting this increased international focus on violence against women and girls in war and conflict, a number of submissions highlighted the need for further action to address the problem.

16 DFAT, *Submission 27*, pp. 38-39.

17 Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect, *Submission 18*, p. 4.

18 Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, 'Global Action to Stop Sexual Violence in Conflict', *Media Release*, 6 June 2014 <foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2014/jb_mr_140606.aspx> viewed 26 August 2015.

19 United Kingdom (UK) Government, 'End Sexual Violence in Conflict Global Summit London 2014', *Statement of Action*, <www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319958/Global_Summit_to_End_Sexual_Violence_Statement_of_Action_1_.pdf> viewed 26 August 2015.

20 Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, 'Australia and United Kingdom Partner to Prevent Sexual Violence in Conflict' *Media Release*, 2 June 2014 <foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2014/jb_mr_140602.aspx>, viewed 4 June 2015.

- 4.15 ActionAid expressed particular concern about ‘the gap between international conventions and the reality on the ground’, arguing that international responses to violence against women and girls ‘as a war tactic’ remain insufficiently prioritised:
- While the United Nations has recognised VAWG [violence against women and girls] as a war crime with various resolutions including UNSCR 1325 recognising the state’s role in protecting the rights of civilian women and girls during armed conflict, the uptake of this resolution has been slow by member states and inadequately resourced. From ActionAid’s experience in humanitarian settings, the first weeks and months of an emergency are essential for establishing adequate mechanisms for the protection of women’s rights and safety ... Too frequently, governments and the international community overlook the direct experiences of women survivors of sexual violence in conflict.²¹
- 4.16 The Asia Pacific Centre noted ‘to date, 41 countries have adopted [Resolution] 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs)’. However, this includes only four countries from ‘the Asia-Pacific region – Australia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Philippines’.²²
- 4.17 Seven international and regional organisations, including the Pacific Island Forum, have integrated UNSCR 1325 plans into their activities. However, the countries of South East Asia and South Asia appear ‘underrepresented’ in the development of both national action plans and regional institutional engagement on implementation of UNSCR 1325.²³
- 4.18 The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) argued that violence against women and girls in conflict is often purposeful and effective in the pursuit of political aims. Further to this, violence ‘can become a habit carried into the post-conflict context’. Citing information from the *UN Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice: Addressing Conflict Related Sexual Violence*, the WILPF submission notes that ‘mass rape is more likely to lead warlords to the negotiating table or the corridors of power than to a prison cell’.²⁴

Women and conflict in the region

- 4.19 While much of the recent international focus on the issue of sexual violence in conflict has been triggered by events in the Middle East and

21 ActionAid, *Submission 29*, pp. 4–5.

22 Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect, *Submission 18*, p. 4.

23 Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect, *Submission 18*, p. 4.

24 WILPF, *Submission 53*, pp. 1–2.

Africa, the Committee received submissions that discussed the circumstances of women and girls in a number of current and past conflicts within the Indo-Pacific region. The following examples taken from the evidence are illustrative of violence women and girls experience in the context of war and conflict in the region.

- 4.20 As noted in chapter two, Colonel Najibullah Samsour of the Afghan National Police told the Committee about the situation faced by 87 per cent of Afghan women who have experienced some form of violence in conflict ridden Afghanistan.²⁵
- 4.21 DFAT highlighted the specific targeting by militants of high-profile women, including Members of Parliament and police women.²⁶ The International Crisis Group (ICG) similarly observed that women in positions of authority in Afghanistan often face threats of violence with a number having been killed by insurgents. The organisation further noted that violence targeting women and girls has extended to girls schools, students and staff.²⁷
- 4.22 The ICG also reported that threats to, and attacks on, women and girls are not confined to the Taliban insurgency:
- Women's rights are also under attack from yesterday's warlords, now powerbrokers both within and outside government. Many former mujahidin who regained power after the Taliban's downfall may not challenge the political order so long as they have lucrative government positions, but they have retained their militias to protect their political and economic interests. Because these private militias are not accountable to the state, they operate with virtual impunity. The more powerful the warlord and his militia, the more likely that rights violations and restrictions on women's mobility could undo fragile gains.²⁸
- 4.23 Several submissions to the inquiry focussed on violence against women and girls in the course of civil conflict in Sri Lanka.²⁹ Human Rights Watch (HRW) submitted that it had:

25 Colonel Najibullah Samsour, Afghan National Police, translated through Mr Mohammad Sharif Policy and Advocacy Office, Oxfam in Afghanistan, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 May 2014, p. 2.

26 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 15.

27 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Supplementary Submission 33.1*, p. 2.

28 ICG, *Supplementary Submission 33.1*, p. 2.

29 See for example submissions from Australian Tamil Congress, *Submission 8*, the High Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Submission 79* and *Supplementary Submission 79.1*; and see Name Withheld, *Submission 64*.

... documented sexual violence committed by members of the Sri Lankan security forces between 2006- 2012 against men and women in state custody ... the Sri Lankan government has blocked reporting and investigation of sexual violence committed by its forces as well as access to medical and psycho-social care.³⁰

4.24 Another submission quoted a HRW report noting that 'rape appears to have been a key element of broader torture and ill treatment' of women by Sri Lankan military forces. The submission further asserted that although this kind of violence occurred towards the end of military conflict and its immediate aftermath, it also 'appears to be continuing to the present day'.³¹

4.25 The High Commissioner of Sri Lanka His Excellency Admiral Thisara Samarasinghe told the Committee that:

Sri Lanka accords highest priority to the protection and promotion of human rights of women. Successive governments have taken proactive steps to ensure equal opportunities for women in society. Necessary laws, regulations and policies have been formulated accordingly. Over the years, Sri Lanka has been in the forefront of advancing women's issues. Sri Lanka became an early party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981 and to its protocol in 2002. Sri Lanka's experience with policies that encourage gender equality and women's empowerment has placed the country in a special category in the developing world. Sri Lanka's political leadership and policy framers recognised early the mutually reinforcing links between gender equality, rapid economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development.³²

4.26 Human Rights Watch drew the Committee's attention to its September 2014 report, *Silenced and Forgotten: Survivors of Nepal's Conflict-Era Sexual Violence*, on sexual violence in Nepal's decade-long civil war between government forces and the Communist Party of Nepal, observing that:

While Nepal's government has acknowledged the rape of women and girls, it has failed to end impunity for abuses or to seek justice and reparations for the victims of these abuses. It has also failed to introduce a comprehensive medical and psycho-social programme

30 Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Supplementary Submission 19.1*, p. 5.

31 Name Withheld, *Submission 64*, p. 4.

32 Sri Lankan High Commissioner, His Excellency Admiral Thisara Sugeeshwara Gunasekara Samarasinghe, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 25 November 2014, p. 1.

to benefit survivors and help them deal with the long-term consequences of sexual violence.³³

4.27 The Department of Defence highlighted a report on *Conflict-related Sexual and Gender Based Violence*, which gave examples of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against girls in fighting forces' in the region, from 1990 to 2003 including in Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia and Timor-Leste.³⁴

4.28 The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) observed that rape has been used as a weapon of warfare in conflicts in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. With regard to the Solomon Islands it was reported that:

Rape of women was 'used as a measure of sanction.' Women and girls were raped by militants in front of their families where family members or the women were suspected of being spies, where compensation could not be afforded, and where militants and their commanders exploited their power to rape women.³⁵

4.29 The SPC stated that perpetrators of sexual violence included:

... militant groups, the state, state-authorised groups and criminal elements who had possession of weapons even after a key peace agreement has been agreed between the warring groups.³⁶

4.30 More broadly, submissions highlighted both the vulnerability and diversity of experience of women and girls in conflict zones. Submissions also emphasised the absence of female leadership or consultation with women's groups in peace processes and in periods of transition from conflict to peace. The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) noted that:

Women's roles in situations of conflict are multiple and varied. Alongside men they are combatants and spoilers, victims and innocent bystanders. Despite this women are overwhelmingly under-represented in conflict prevention and peace processes.³⁷

4.31 Australia's *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018* also emphasises the diversity and complexity of the impacts of war and conflict on women and girls:

Women and girls are not a homogenous group. Just as women and men have differential experiences of conflict, conflict affects

33 Human Rights Watch, *Supplementary Submission 19.1*, p. 4.

34 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 9.

35 SPC, *Supplementary Submission 24.1*, p. 1.

36 SPC, *Supplementary Submission 24.1*, p. 2.

37 Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), *Submission 25*, p. 17.

diverse groups of women and girls in very different ways. Women of various ages, women with disability, indigenous women and women from certain religious or cultural backgrounds may be more profoundly affected or more vulnerable than other groups of women. They may find it difficult to access support or infrastructure to meet their specific needs, or be more likely to experience gender-based violence.³⁸

- 4.32 The following evidence highlights some of the risks and vulnerabilities that women and girls might face in or while fleeing conflict situations. For example, the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) highlighted the particular vulnerability of displaced women and girls who may have no documentation or legal protection:

Refugee women of any and all ages report being raped. However, several groups are at heightened risk of sexual violence. Women report to us that experiences of rape, especially for young women, makes the woman survivor even more vulnerable to further rapes and to being targeted for trafficking or survival sex.

Unaccompanied minor girls are at great risk. They frequently live in exploitative or abusive 'foster' arrangements, and in camp settings in which we have worked are often forced to work as domestic servants for more powerful families, where they are subject to sexual exploitation.³⁹

- 4.33 Save the Children noted that evidence suggests conflict is a major cause or catalyst for trafficking, '[as] wars, armed conflicts and occupation of territories often lead to increased trafficking and sexual assault'.⁴⁰ Save the Children also reported that:

Trafficking of women, girls and boys for sexual exploitation is prevalent in conflict affected or post-conflict nations in our region, especially Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka.⁴¹

- 4.34 Slavery Links Australia further noted that:

... UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] presents evidence that where people and their society are stressed by conflict (arising from war, disaster or epidemic such as HIV AIDS) the incidence of

38 DFAT, *Exhibit 53*: 2012, p. 6.

39 Centre for Refugee Research, *Submission 35*, p. 4.

40 Save the Children Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 9. UN CEDAW comment attributed to the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector*, Geneva, 2011, p. 87.

41 Save the Children Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 8.

forced marriage may actually increase, apparently as a hopeful or last-ditch attempt to protect girls within a marriage.⁴²

- 4.35 Amnesty International also pointed out that experiences of women and girls in conflict situations often reflect patterns of discrimination and injustice that existed prior to conflict:

All barriers faced by women in accessing justice before the national courts prior to conflict, such as legal, procedural, institutional, social and practical, and entrenched gender discrimination are exacerbated during conflict, persist during the post-conflict period and operate alongside the breakdown of the police and judicial structures to deny or hinder their access to justice.⁴³

Australian efforts

- 4.36 DFAT reported that Australia has been actively engaged in contributing to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. Australia's work in this area has involved providing practical support to address issues affecting women and men during and after conflict. DFAT explained that assistance has been provided to:

... women's organisations, partner governments and international organisations to ensure that women participate in peace processes, that their needs for protection are met and that gender perspectives are included in peacekeeping operations.⁴⁴

- 4.37 DFAT's annual report for 2014–15 notes that in November 2014, during Australia's second presidency of the United Nations Security Council, Australia's representatives 'drew on our experience in gender-responsive policing in Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu to ensure women, peace and security was a key issue in a landmark resolution on policing – Resolution 2185.'⁴⁵
- 4.38 Australia launched its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security on International Women's Day in 2012. DFAT described the National Action Plan (NAP) as 'a practical step forward in Australia's efforts to implement UNSCR1325'. The NAP 'sets out what the Government will do, at home and overseas, to promote the women, peace and security agenda'.⁴⁶

42 Slavery Links Australia, *Submission 88*, p. 11.

43 Amnesty International, *Submission 74*, p. 9.

44 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 48.

45 DFAT, *Annual Report 2014–15*, p. 118.

46 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 45.

- 4.39 The submission from the Department of Defence explained that the NAP is intended to provide:
- ... a framework for a coordinated whole-of-Government approach to implementing the objectives of UNSCR 1325, and related resolutions. Government agencies reporting under the NAP include Defence, the Australian Civil Military Centre (ACMC), Australian Federal Police (AFP), Attorney-General's Department, DFAT, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C). The Office for Women in PM&C is the lead for the coordination of reporting against the NAP.⁴⁷
- 4.40 The NAP has focussed on five key thematic areas identified by the United Nations and described as 'pillars'.⁴⁸ The five thematic areas, as described in Australia's plan, are: Prevention; Participation; Protection, Relief and Recovery; and Normative. The last thematic area, 'normative' refers to raising awareness about and developing policy frameworks to progress the women, peace and security agenda; and integrating a gender perspective across government policies on peace and security.⁴⁹
- 4.41 Australian aid supports 'the N-Peace Network, which promotes women's leadership for conflict prevention, resolution and peace building in the region.' This network has:
- ... over 1600 members representing government, civil society, grassroots organisations, NGOs, academic institutions, media and religious groups across Afghanistan, Nepal, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.⁵⁰
- 4.42 DFAT explained that the N-Peace Network:
- ... provides a safe platform for sharing ideas, increasing dialogue between government and civil society on issues related to WPS [Women, peace and security] and documenting best practices critical for peace building. Through the N-Peace Awards, Australia's support also provides recognition of women peace advocates for their leadership in conflict prevention, women's empowerment and peace building in the region.⁵¹
- 4.43 The Australian Federal Police (AFP) informed the Committee on measures that support Australia's National Action Plan:

47 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 2.

48 United Nations, *Women Peace and Security: Report of the UN Secretary-General*, 6 April 2010.

49 DFAT, *Exhibit 53: 2012*, p. 17.

50 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

51 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

The AFP International Deployment Group predominantly undertakes police capacity development in the Indo-Pacific region. Police development is a support provided to police in post-conflict and developing nations, to build their capacity to provide sustainable and quality policing to their citizens. This support is delivered by enhancing the operational capacity, leadership and enabling services of partner agencies. Those partner agencies are supported through human rights, gender equality and diversity delivery. This is integral to all AFP missions and incorporates into mission design and evaluation processes all aspects of human rights. In keeping with the National Action Plan the AFP has developed a gender strategy ... for the International Deployment Group. The strategy outlines the ways in which gender will be normalised in all IDG work, including daily operations, police development programs and stability operations.⁵²

4.44 DFAT provided the Committee with the *2014 Progress Report: Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*. The report reviewed Australia's progress on implementing the plan since 2012 and found that 'the Government is tracking well against its responsibilities under the National Action Plan'.⁵³

4.45 Specific achievements recognised in the report include:

- Policy: Integration of a gender perspective into 29 official Government policy and guidance documents related to peace and security.⁵⁴
- Staff training: 54.3 per cent of the 1 141 Australian military, police and Australian Public Service personnel deployed in operations received training on Women, Peace and Security in the period.⁵⁵
- Audits: The Australian-Civil Military Centre undertook an audit of its policies and activities 'to ensure best practice standards and effective integration of gender perspectives across program activities, and to develop the *ACMC National Action Plan Implementation Plan*'.⁵⁶
- Representation: Work to remove restrictions that limit the number of women deployed in conflict and post conflict zones, such as removing the restriction on women serving in combat roles.⁵⁷

52 Ms Mandy Newton, Assistant Commissioner, National Manager, International Deployment Group, Australian Federal Police, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 September 2014, p. 24.

53 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: Australian Government, Progress Report Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2014*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014, p. 8.

54 DFAT *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 8.

55 DFAT *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 8.

56 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, pp. 15–16.

57 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 8-23.

- Engagement: Support for international dialogues and engagements to engage civil society with the women, peace and security agenda, such as the 2013 Annual Civil Society Organisation Dialogue in Canberra.⁵⁸
 - Advocacy: International activities, such as training UN military observers in Kenya and Rwanda on Women, Peace and Security, and the roles and vulnerabilities of women and children in conflict zones.⁵⁹
- 4.46 The Progress Report also provided an update on the N-Peace network, saying it has ‘successfully brought increased visibility of Women, Peace and Security issues and is gradually expanding to countries in the Pacific including Papua New Guinea’.⁶⁰ Through the network:
- ... spaces have been provided to women’s groups for dialogues, which have resulted in increased knowledge and visibility of Women, Peace and Security issues in the countries and the Asia region. Women participants have also acknowledged stronger network and partnerships for advocacy resulting in effective implementation of UNSCR 1325.⁶¹
- 4.47 In the wake of the 2013 Annual Civil Society Organisation Dialogue, the Australian Council for International Development, UN Women and the ANU Gender Institute collaborated to produce the *2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*.⁶²
- 4.48 The report was broadly positive about Australia’s efforts in promoting the women, peace and security agenda, including through its term on the United Nations Security Council, finding that there had been ‘significant advancements’ made.⁶³ However, the report also offered suggestions for improvement, and identified opportunities. These overall recommendations were:
- Create consistency within and across departments of WPS implementation. This requires ensuring each department appoint an operational senior level WPS focal point and develop an adequately resourced and publicly available WPS implementation plan.

58 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, pp. 27–28.

59 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 43.

60 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 74.

61 DFAT, *Exhibit 52: 2014*, p. 75.

62 Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), United Nations Women (UN Women), Australian National University (ANU) Gender Institute, *2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, <genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/news/2014-civil-society-report-card> viewed 13 August 2015.

63 ACFID, UN Women, ANU Gender Institute, *2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, p. 2, viewed 13 August 2015.

- Ensure the intentionality of NAP activities in meeting WPS goals. This acknowledges the specific focus of WPS work (as opposed to broader gender or peace and security work) and targets activities towards NAP obligations and WPS values.
- Ensure that reviews offer a qualitative analysis of outcomes of NAP activities rather than only listing quantitative outputs. This will ensure activities can be continually refined and outcomes are measured against goals.
- Continue the development of an open, productive and directed partnership with civil society that takes advantage of its skills, experience and community engagement.⁶⁴

4.49 The report concluded that Australia had the opportunity to continue its 'momentum' by further 'promoting [women, peace and security] implementation through its regional engagements in the Indo-Pacific'. To achieve this, the report suggested:

- [P]roviding advocacy and support to increase women's participation in conflict resolution and formal and informal peace processes in conflict affected regions such as Burma.
- [Supporting] the development and implementation of NAPs throughout the region including the Pacific Regional Action Plan and plans in the Solomon Islands and Japan.
- Strategies ensuring the protection of women must be integrated into all of Australia's overseas operations.⁶⁵

4.50 DFAT also highlighted Australian support for the inclusion of women in peace efforts in Afghanistan, providing an example of the Australian Government's recent efforts to protect women and girls in conflict during a United Nations Assistance mission to Afghanistan.⁶⁶ During the mission, Australia advocated for 'new and strengthened provisions to support political participation by Afghan women', enhanced protection for women and girls from sexual violence, the need to 'hold perpetrators of gender-based violence to account', and the need to 'maintain legislative protections for Afghan women'.⁶⁷

4.51 DFAT noted that through the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP), women are:

... actively encouraged to engage in peace and reconciliation activities, including through conferences, civil society

64 ACFID, UN Women, ANU Gender Institute, *2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, p. 2, viewed 13 August 2015.

65 ACFID, UN Women, ANU Gender Institute, *2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, pp. 16–17, viewed 13 August 2015.

66 DFAT refers to this as the 'United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) Mandate Renewal (Resolution 2145)'. DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

67 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

organizations, membership of the High Peace Council and of the Provincial Peace Councils (PPCs).⁶⁸

4.52 Further to this, DFAT explained that:

... APRP has established close partnerships with government institutions, including the Ministry of Women Affairs, to deliver its programs. At the provincial level, PPCs comprise key local stakeholders, including women, who are responsible for initiating and supporting peace initiatives in their communities.⁶⁹

4.53 Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja, has made the protection of women and girls in conflict zones a priority in her advocacy.⁷⁰ The Ambassador noted that:

My work to promote Australia's women, peace and security agenda has been certainly a priority for government, especially during the term that Australia has had on the UN Security Council. I am confident that that priority on women, peace and security will continue, even though we are no longer represented on the council.⁷¹

4.54 DFAT advised that the number of vulnerable women and girls provided with lifesaving assistance through Australian Aid in conflict and crisis situations in 2012-13 was 1 675 834, and 3 726 581 were supported in 2013-14.⁷²

4.55 The Defence Department's submission emphasised Australia's responsibility under United Nations Security Council resolutions to protect women and girls from violence arising from conflict. More broadly the Department affirmed, '[i]t is in Australia's interest to encourage the participation of women in peace processes and to create structures that promote gender equality in support of lasting peace'.⁷³

4.56 The submission from Defence noted that Australian Defence Force (ADF) members deployed in NATO and United Nations missions are required to 'understand the unique role that women can play in the host country'. The submission further noted:

68 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

69 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

70 DFAT, *Submission 27*, pp. 39-40.

71 Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, Ambassador for Women and Girls, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 December 2014, p. 2.

72 DFAT, *Submission 27.2*, p.13, cited from 'DFAT Results Bank 2014'. DFAT notes that further detail would be required to ensure these figures are fully comparable.

73 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 1.

The ADF has previously deployed female engagement teams as part of the provincial reconstruction capability in Afghanistan, and since 2013, deployed senior ADF women as NATO GA (Gender Advisor).⁷⁴

4.57 To improve awareness of the issues and challenges facing women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, the ADF stated it has undertaken a number of ‘communication events’ such as contributing to international forums, including:

... the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives conference, and the 2013 UN Development Program Gender Perspectives Conference Asia ... national government and civil society events on WPS and related issues, civil-military workshops, International Women’s Day events, and the 2013 inaugural national CDF Gender Conference ... In addition, Defence has contributed articles for internal and external media consumption, and in NATO and UN publications.⁷⁵

4.58 The Annual Chief of the Defence Force Gender Conference has also focused on women in peace and security operations.⁷⁶

4.59 Australia’s then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, emphasised to the Committee the critical role of leadership in changing the behaviour of military forces towards women and girls in conflict zones:

At the most elemental point the soldier has the choice to either be a protector or a perpetrator. There is without doubt a high level of sexual violence perpetrated by men, almost exclusively, in armies around the world and there is a requirement, in my view, for all leaders of any armies to address matters around culture that go to the heart of the choice that individual soldiers will make, either to be a perpetrator or a protector.⁷⁷

Justice, reparation and women’s involvement in conflict resolution and peace processes

4.60 A number of submissions to the Committee argued that notwithstanding increased attention by the United Nations there is still much that urgently

74 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 6.

75 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 7.

76 Department of Defence, *Submission 73*, p. 7.

77 Lieutenant General David Morrison, Chief of the Army, Department of Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 2 September 2014, p. 1.

needs to be done to address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. In particular, to ensure access to justice or reconciliation for victims and the engagement of women in conflict resolution and peace making.

- 4.61 Lieutenant General Morrison particularly emphasised the need to bring perpetrators of violence against women and girls to account:

From my attendance at the global summit and from my participation in military operations or my study of them, without a doubt holding men – primarily men of course – to account following the perpetration of a violent sexual act is probably the most important thing at the moment. ... Education is very important. The United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 goes to the heart of this and Australia is a signatory to it. We train all of our personnel who are deploying what is right and what has to be done if they come across instances of sexual violence. But there is, when you look around the world at the moment, such a long way to go. The very first thing that could be done is to hold people to account.⁷⁸

- 4.62 The submission from ActionAid suggested that '[t]oo frequently, governments and the international community overlook the direct experiences of women survivors of sexual violence in conflict'.⁷⁹

- 4.63 ActionAid, in partnership with Sydney University and with funding from the Australian Government, stated that the partners are seeking to:

... [provide] opportunities to understand women's interpretation of justice and to gain first hand information about access to justice for survivors. For example, women who were forcibly abducted and recruited as child soldiers during the civil war in Uganda have shared that they are seeking reparations from the government in the form of education for their children, as this was a right that they were denied as children.⁸⁰

- 4.64 Ms Irene Santiago, the Lead Convener of 'Women Seriously', noted in her submission that women are often excluded from peace processes. She stated that while peace negotiations are about ending war, women will not be invited to sit at the peace negotiation table as war is traditionally seen as a male dominated sphere of activity. However, if peace negotiations were

78 Lieutenant General Morrison, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 2 September 2014, pp. 5–6.

79 ActionAid Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

80 ActionAid Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

seen to be about building peace then women would be more likely to be included in negotiations.⁸¹

- 4.65 The WILPF cited research in Burma, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bougainville and Fiji that suggested women have found peace processes to be as gendered as conflict itself, with women either not being included in the process or 'offered an advisory role only.' The organisation reported:

Experience has shown that this leads to women's perspectives being ignored or sidelined, which, in turn, is a barrier to their human rights being safeguarded or promoted. The inclusion of a gender perspective in peace processes means finding ways in which women's perspectives can be included at an early stage, rather than as an afterthought.⁸²

- 4.66 Quoting an article by Hunt Swanee and Cristina Posa, *Women Waging Peace*, the WILPF also commented that '[a]llowing men who plan wars to plan peace is a bad habit'.⁸³

- 4.67 ACFID was also highly critical of the lack of female representation in peace negotiations:

... women are overwhelmingly under-represented in conflict prevention and peace processes. Of the 31 peace processes through the period 1992-2011, only 9 [per cent] had female negotiators present. UNSC Resolution 1325 affirms the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all areas of work to maintain and promote peace and security. A discussion of the role of women in conflict and peace should move beyond a sole focus on protection and violence, which sees women only as passive victims of conflict, and recognise women's agency and participation in situations of transition from conflict to peace.⁸⁴

- 4.68 However, the risk to women who obtain public roles was noted in evidence by Amnesty International who observed that in Afghanistan:

Two leaders of the women's department in the Laghman province were murdered in succession in a period of about six months. I think something like 70 women in public life in Afghanistan were murdered last year. So we think Australia focusing on the whole

81 Ms Irene M Santiago, Lead Convener, 'Women Seriously', Global Campaign on Women, Peace and Security, *Submission 85*, p. 1.

82 WILPF, *Submission 53*, p. 1.

83 WILPF, *Submission 53*, p. 4. See also, Hunt, Swanee and Posa, 'Women Waging Peace' *Foreign Policy*, 2001, 124, pp. 38-47.

84 ACFID, *Submission 25*, p. 17.

women, peace and security agenda, which will allow women to be more involved in peace building and political participation, will have genuine benefits.⁸⁵

4.69 Amnesty International recommended that Australia encourage and support the efforts of civil society organisations:

... including women groups and human rights defenders, to improve the monitoring and documentation of human rights violations, including cases of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and empower survivors to access justice.⁸⁶

4.70 Amnesty further argued that it is equally essential to ensure women's full and equal participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, in order to ensure that issues that affect women including their 'economic and political empowerment and sexual and gender-based violence adequately are addressed.'⁸⁷

4.71 However, WILPF made that point that 'just because a woman is present at peace talks ... does not mean that she will represent the views of other women, which are themselves not monolithic'.⁸⁸

4.72 The WILPF further argued that '[s]pecific expertise is required to translate gender issues into gender sensitive language', in peace talks, adding:

Although the possession by women of natural peacemaking skills is controversial, it is accepted that they bring different perspectives and motivations to the peace table and, in general, they are still the main proponents of gender-sensitive issues. Further, their very presence may contribute symbolic, as well as practical, value to the process. In any event, as UN Women recognises 'A case in which peace negotiations were derailed due to women's demands has yet to be discovered'.⁸⁹

Refugee women and girls

4.73 A number of submissions to the inquiry raised the plight of women and girls who live in refugee camps or urban areas, having fled their homes as a result of war, conflict or natural disasters.

85 Ms Sophie Nicolle, Government Relations Adviser, Amnesty International, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 August 2014, p. 6.

86 Amnesty International, *Submission 74*, p. 12.

87 Amnesty International, *Submission 74*, p. 9.

88 WILPF, *Submission 53*, p. 5.

89 WILPF, *Submission 53*, p. 5.

4.74 The submission from the Refugee Council of Australia observed that '[s]exual and gender based violence (SGBV) is endemic in refugee situations, not only in Asia but across the world'.⁹⁰ The Council submitted that:

Women and girls constitute around half of the global refugee population, a proportion that has remained consistent over the past decade. While women and girls face the same challenges as other refugees and asylum seekers in the region, they also face additional risks and barriers due to their gender.⁹¹

4.75 The Centre for Refugee Research similarly commented:

While all forcibly displaced people experience human rights violations and abuses, entrenched social disadvantage and gender discrimination result in women and girls facing heightened risks and increased violations in the displacement context. This is exacerbated by severe disruption to family/community support and protection, by the absence of gender-sensitive responses to their situation, and by their lack of legal status and protection in the country of asylum.⁹²

4.76 Evidence to the inquiry suggested that the types of violence that can affect women and girls in refugee camps include sexual and gender-based violence, family violence, sexual exploitation and harassment.⁹³

4.77 Family separation can also put women and girls at greater risk of violence. The Refugee Council of Australia pointed out:

... individual family members – particularly women – can face greater risks apart than they do when the family remains together. For example, single women and female-headed households are often at greater risk of violence and exploitation than families which include adult male relatives. Women may also find it more difficult to financially support their families without the assistance of other family members due to the often limited livelihood opportunities available to women.⁹⁴

4.78 With particular reference to the plight of women in Asia, the Centre for Refugee Research explored the places and risk factors that contribute to violence against women and girls in refugee communities:

90 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 5.

91 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 5.

92 Centre for Refugee Research, *Submission 35*, p. 2.

93 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 6.

94 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 6.

Women report sexual violence occurring in the workplace, on public transport, at the markets at night, from landlords, in parks and public places and in the home. The women with whom we have worked have identified many factors that intersect to increase the risks ... These include lack of access to livelihoods ... lack of secure shelter, and complete lack of access to formal justice systems.⁹⁵

- 4.79 The Refugee Council of Australia pointed out that Australia ‘makes a significant contribution to addressing the needs of refugee women and girls through its Refugee and Humanitarian Program’ further stating that:

Over the past five years, around 40 [per cent] of the humanitarian visas issued under the Program have been granted to women and girls. Australia also offers targeted resettlement opportunities for refugee women through the Woman at Risk program, designed for women and their dependents who are without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender. RCOA welcomes the commitment of the Australian Government to offering these targeted resettlement places on an ongoing basis.⁹⁶

Disasters and gender-based violence

- 4.80 Evidence to the Committee strongly suggested that women and girls are also disproportionately vulnerable in times of disaster. One of the flow-on effects of disasters for women and girls appears to be an increased risk of gender-based violence.

- 4.81 The Asia Pacific region is particularly prone to natural disasters. Save the Children noted that in 2013 there were some 334 country level disasters across 109 countries worldwide, ‘resulting in 22 616 people killed, 96 million people affected, and economic damages in the vicinity of USD 118 billion’. In that year:

... Asia experienced 88 [per cent] of all disaster-related mortality, as compared to the decadal average of 62 [per cent] (2003 to 2012). Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines (7 986 killed) and imposed damages equalling 5 [per cent] of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁹⁷

95 Centre for Refugee Research, *Submission 35*, p. 4.

96 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission 34*, p. 7.

97 Save the Children Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

4.82 The submission further noted that, in the same year, a single flood event in India claimed 6 054 lives. Floods in the Solomon Islands, disasters in the Philippines, and the landslides in Afghanistan highlighted 'the endemic disaster risk right across the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific region'.⁹⁸

4.83 In its supplementary submission to the inquiry, CARE Australia observed that natural disasters are not just physical events but can cause massive social dislocation:

Disasters affect power dynamics at all layers of society, whether at the political level, within communities or within households. And indeed, gender roles change, across age and over time, and a humanitarian crisis can lead to radical changes, both for people who stay in the affected region and for people who flee.⁹⁹

4.84 The Director of ActionAid Mr Archie Law argued that natural disasters increase women's vulnerability to violence and can reverse hard won social progress:

In terms of barriers to women's rights in the region, emergencies and natural disasters in particular are increasing women's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse. These also create setbacks of years in terms of the broader developmental gains that had been made before disasters strike.¹⁰⁰

4.85 ActionAid observed that 'addressing VAWG [violence against women and girls] in humanitarian settings is crucial to ending the cycle of vulnerability, marginalisation, exclusion and poverty faced by women'. However, only 'limited data is available in the region on links between VAWG and disasters'. Despite this, the organisation observed, 'reports from other areas are instructive'. The organisation noted the following example:

... eighteen months after the earthquake in Haiti, women and girls reported having experienced widespread sexual abuse and exploitation as they struggled to obtain the basic goods and services needed to survive.¹⁰¹

4.86 The GLASS Research Unit submitted that natural disasters exacerbate existing gender inequalities and further 'increase men's violence against women'. GLASS also suggested, 'it is highly likely that the recent flood in

98 Save the Children Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

99 CARE Australia, *Supplementary Submission 54.1*, p.1

100 Mr Archie Law, Director, ActionAid, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 21 August 2014, p. 11.

101 ActionAid Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

Honiara resulted in further incidences of MVAWG [male violence against women and girls]'.¹⁰²

- 4.87 GLASS also pointed out that finding a safe place to seek shelter from disasters can be problematic for women:

Violence against women is common in shelters during and after environmental disasters and there are moves across the world to make shelters more gender sensitive as a result. In situations where they are not gender sensitive, women and girls are choosing not to seek shelter.¹⁰³

- 4.88 Similarly, Professor Hilary Bambrick argued that disasters caused by climate change in turn cause social disruption which can increase the exposure of women and girls to the risk of violence:

Whether they are in emergency shelters because of an extreme event or because of forced migration and conflict over the increasingly scarce resources of land, water and food, climate change threatens the safety of women and girls.¹⁰⁴

- 4.89 Dr Priya Chattier advised that the impacts of environmental change are often a threat to food security and to the livelihoods of women, with Pacific women most likely to be affected by the impacts on crop rotation, reef fish stocks, damage to houses from more intense tropical cyclones, and from rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns and ensuing water shortages.¹⁰⁵ She recommended:

It is essential that Australia's aid programme for the Pacific examine the situation of rural women in the Pacific region and identifies and pursues opportunities to analyse and integrate gender dimensions and strategies to empower rural women in all aspects of agricultural and rural development. Women's concerns and knowledge on food security could be better signposted in other programmes concerned with climate change mitigation, adaptation, awareness raising and sustainable resource management, all of which impact on women's lives.¹⁰⁶

- 4.90 Professor Hilary Bambrick referred to successful work conducted by the Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN) through the Live and Learn environment centre in Kiribati:

102 GLASS Research Unit, Monash University, *Submission 7*, pp. 11–12.

103 GLASS Research Unit, *Submission 7*, p. 4.

104 Professor Hilary Bambrick, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 May 2015, p. 17.

105 Dr Priya Chattier, *Submission 55*, p. 3.

106 Dr Priya Chattier, *Submission 55*, p. 4.

Live and Learn have been working at the community level to develop much more sustainable farming in the area – one of the problems in Kiribati is that you get tidal inundation and you lose everything that you have just planted, so it is a matter of trying to find crops that can withstand that and diversifying and things like that – teaching women, in particular, not only how to grow things but how to sell them as well. It is about community enterprise.¹⁰⁷

Gender sensitive disaster relief and reconstruction

4.91 Evidence suggested that governments and humanitarian agencies need to make greater efforts to provide humanitarian assistance that takes into account the needs of women and girls during and after disasters.

4.92 ActionAid observed that:

... many humanitarian agencies often lack the capacity to address women's human rights in these settings. Beyond immediate relief and support for women, they are not equipped or mandated to respond to VAWG in disaster and conflict settings.¹⁰⁸

4.93 The GLASS submission observed that failures by governments and humanitarian agencies to consult with women and girls in post disaster relief and reconstruction could result in 'unintended consequences' and adverse outcomes:

In two sites in different countries of the region we are aware of rebuilding that included the siting of toilets at the end of a road of newly constructed houses. In both cases women and girls have been victims of sexual violence when going to the toilets. It is therefore important that the Australian government's aid efforts do not add to the human rights abuses of women and girls, that women and girls are consulted about reconstruction efforts and that funds are fairly distributed.¹⁰⁹

4.94 To combat gender-based violence, CARE Australia argued that a gender-sensitive approach to humanitarian assistance is essential:

Dedicated GBV expertise and stand-alone GBV initiatives are essential to enable survivors to have a place to turn to for the multi-sectoral support they require, including medical services, psycho-social support as well as potentially legal, security and longer-term livelihoods assistance. However, too often agencies

107 Professor Hilary Bambrick, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra 7 May 2015, p. 20; for other Live and Learn activities see Live and Learn International, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

108 ActionAid, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

109 GLASS Research Unit, Monash University, *Submission 7*, p. 5.

delivering programs in other sectors, such as WASH, food security, shelter, refugee camp management and so on, fail to factor gender into their efforts. The consequence is that opportunities are missed to mitigate GBV risks in their project design. Without that mainstreaming, we notice that even in cases where stand-alone GBV services are available, the numbers of survivors accessing these services are low in comparison to the levels of GBV reported through wider needs assessments. Effective referral systems are crucial.¹¹⁰

- 4.95 CARE Australia told the Committee that the ‘humanitarian world’ have recognised the importance of addressing gender in emergencies, including through:

... the publication of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, Guidelines on Gender-based Violence and the Minimum Initial Service Package for Reproductive Health in Emergencies, the deployment of international gender advisers, the promotion of an IASC gender marker, and the collection of sex and age disaggregated data and more.¹¹¹

- 4.96 CARE Australia further noted, however, that: ‘On the international political and donor agenda however, the topic has received far less attention, with the exception of sexual violence’.¹¹²

- 4.97 Ms Julianne Scenna, Director, Government and Multilaterals, at World Vision Australia told the Committee:

I would also highlight gender based responses in emergencies. The Australian government has had significant involvement in humanitarian responses. There is a large bank of evidence on the impact of violence against women and girls and sexual based violence in emergencies but also on the success of gender-responsive approaches and disaster-preparedness training, in safe spaces, for women and children in the case of emergency responses. Having intentional gender focus in our humanitarian program would be another area that I would call out.¹¹³

- 4.98 DFAT advised that its Humanitarian Action Policy includes a commitment to gender equality in humanitarian action:

110 CARE Australia, *Supplementary Submission 54.1*, p. 6.

111 CARE Australia, *Supplementary Submission 54.1*, p. 3.

112 CARE Australia, *Supplementary Submission 54.1*, p. 3.

113 Ms Julianne Scenna, Director, Government and Multilaterals, World Vision Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 August 2014, p. 14.

The policy supports the active participation of women, girls, boys and men, and the increased disaggregation of data by sex. Protection is a core component of Australia's humanitarian action. Australia has a long-standing commitment to protecting people affected by natural disasters and human-induced crises, reflecting our desire to prevent and reduce the violence, exploitation and deprivation that people in such situations face.¹¹⁴

- 4.99 The Department further advised that the Australian Government released its first 'Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework' in 2013, with a commitment to fund dedicated protection programs, and for protection to be mainstreamed in humanitarian action:

For all humanitarian investments over \$3 million it is compulsory to complete a Humanitarian Response Aid Quality Check (HAQC). HAQCs are similar to AQCs but contain modified criteria suited to assess how well humanitarian response investments are performing. This means that each humanitarian investment must be rated on its ability to make a difference to gender equality and empowering women and girls. HAQCs also include a criterion on protection. This includes an assessment of the extent to which the investment includes measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and the extent to which the monitoring and evaluation system for the investment collects sex, disability and age disaggregated data.¹¹⁵

- 4.100 CARE Australia observed, however, that while 'there is rhetorical support for gender programming in emergencies, in practice many actors are still working "gender-blind"', and were consequently less effective, risking negative outcomes:

If we neglect or ignore gender issues in emergencies, we fail to recognise the different needs, capacities and contributions of women, girls, boys and men, and operations that do not respond to gendered needs risk being discriminatory in their delivery. At best this means the work is less effective and at worst, it risks harming the communities we are supposed to serve.¹¹⁶

- 4.101 The need for a greater emphasis on gender responsiveness during disasters was further highlighted by World Vision:

114 DFAT, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015, p. 6.

115 DFAT, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015, p. 7.

116 CARE Australia, *Supplementary Submission 54.1*, p. 2.

The Australian government has had significant involvement in humanitarian responses. There is a large bank of evidence on the impact of violence against women and girls and sexual based violence in emergencies but also on the success of gender-responsive approaches and disaster-preparedness training, in safe spaces, for women and children in the case of emergency responses. Having intentional gender focus in our humanitarian program would be another area that I would call out.¹¹⁷

4.102 CARE Australia argued that the programs that directly ‘address the needs of women and girls in emergencies, such as preventing and responding to gender-based violence, must be resourced’.¹¹⁸

4.103 Amnesty International submitted to the inquiry the need to pursue a ‘practical and cohesive programme of action’ to address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations, taking into account factors, including:

... gender inequality; the continuing lack of women’s participation in conflict resolution and peace processes; and lack of access to justice, truth and reparation for victims of crimes of sexual and gender-based violence under international law, whether they are male or female, adult or child.¹¹⁹

4.104 DFAT also noted that sometimes post conflict situations can provide opportunities to make change for the better:

Sometimes we see post conflict as an opportunity, where there has been a disruption. The United Nations, for example, in both Afghanistan and in Timor ensured that the constitutions were drafted in such a way that gender equality was embedded within the constitutions. We saw that as well in Sierra Leone, and of course Sierra Leone is one of the two countries in the world now where women outnumber men in parliament. That emerged post conflict because there was the drafting by an international consortium, along with the country concerned, of the constitution. And we see the same in both Timor-Leste and Afghanistan – that there is probably greater representation by women then there would have otherwise been. So there are entry points and sometimes opportunities emerge from post-conflict environments

117 Ms Scenna, World Vision Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 August 2014, p. 14.

118 CARE Australia, *Submission 54.1*, p. 2.

119 Amnesty International, *Submission 74*, p. 8.

as well, which is clearly unfortunate. But thinking originally about where the entry points might be is usually the way we do it.¹²⁰

Committee comment

- 4.105 The Committee is aware of the considerable international attention that has been focussed recently on the issue of gendered violence in conflict. This has built on some 15 years of diplomacy with the UNSCR 1325 and subsequent Security Council resolutions which have established a clear international framework providing guidance for measures to address this persistent problem.
- 4.106 The Australian Government has been active in this policy area and is to be commended for adopting and working to implement a National Action Plan on women, peace and security. The Government is also to be commended for its work in Afghanistan advocating for the inclusion of women in peace efforts.¹²¹
- 4.107 Against this background, Australia's diplomatic efforts may be most usefully focussed on regional dialogue and engagement. Some proposals made to the Committee for the Australian Government to adopt included:
- Leading an annual ASEAN–Australia Dialogue held for parliamentarians, judicial, public service and security sectors on Women, Peace and Security.
 - Facilitating an Australia–ASEAN Annual Dialogue on Defending Women's Rights that could promote and defend women's human rights and could, for example, engage in areas such as training and awareness of international legal instruments.¹²²
 - Supporting the implementation of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and increase resources committed to ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan.¹²³
- 4.108 The Committee was pleased to hear from DFAT officials, the Ambassador for Women and Girls, the ADF and AFP, and UN Women, as well as a number of other organisations who work in this critical area.
- 4.109 Evidence received by the Committee indicates a key aspect of combating violence relates back to the broader issue of the need to educate men,

120 Ms Sally Moyle, Principle Gender Specialist, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 June 2014, p. 6.

121 DFAT, *Submission 27*, p. 39.

122 Asia Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect, *Submission 18*, pp. 5–7.

123 WILPF, *Submission 53*, p. 10.

governments and legal sectors on the need to include women and girls in peace negotiations, relief efforts and post conflict reconstruction.

- 4.110 The Committee supports proposals for greater focus on the role that women and girls can and should play in responses to humanitarian crises.
- 4.111 The Committee also notes DFAT's reliance on international agencies to deliver gender equality outcomes in the context of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. It would seem timely – with the increased gender focus of the Australian Aid Program – that a review be conducted to ensure that agencies have, or are developing and implementing, gender sensitive programming in an agreed and co-ordinated fashion during humanitarian crises.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- adopt the proposals made in the 2014 Second Annual Civil Society Report Card: Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and
- encourage governments in the region, which have not already done so, to prioritise the approval of national action plans for UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work to ensure that Australian responses to disasters and humanitarian crises factor in the unique and additional needs of women and children, by ensuring:

- that all plans, toolkits and guidance documentation for humanitarian and disaster relief include a requirement to take into account the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women and children, and guidance on how this can be achieved; and
- humanitarian responses funded by the Australian Government model gender-sensitive processes, and avoid additional harms to women and children.

