

## UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO HOLD HISTORIC DEBATE ON WOMEN AND PEACE

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New York, October 17, 2000 – The UN Security Council will acknowledge women's vital role in ending conflict at an unprecedented debate on the impact of war on women, the NGO Working Group on Women and International Peace and Security announced today.

The October 23-24 sessions will also tackle protection for women in war zones, including tougher penalties for peacekeeping troops who exploit or abuse women, and support for women involved in disarmament.

"Finally the Security Council is recognizing that women play a vital role in building peace and trust," said Eugenia Piza-Lopez from the NGO Working Group. "Unless high-level decisions on resolving conflict are sensitive to the unique situation and contribution of women, the UN will miss real opportunities for peace."

The Security Council will hear testimonies from prominent women from war-torn countries, including **Sierra Leone** and **East Timor**, before putting questions to experts from humanitarian and human rights organizations. Council members will then discuss the recommendations in an open session that could lead to a UN resolution on women and peace.

The NGO Working Group's recommendations to the Security Council include:

- Consulting and including women's groups in peace negotiations
- Training peacekeepers to be aware of the special situation of women
- Promoting more women to senior UN positions in conflict areas

"There has been virtual impunity for violations against women at the hands of peacekeeping troops," said Mary Diaz, also from the NGO Working Group. "In addition, women are still under-represented in senior UN posts. The UN Mission in **Kosovo**, for example, included very few women in leadership positions."

In **Northern Ireland**, women's groups worked for ten years to build the level of trust between Catholics and Protestants. In **Liberia**, women demanded disarmament and gathered at arms depots to collect weapons from fighters on both sides. Yet women like these are rarely given access to high-level peace negotiations. At the **Burundi** peace negotiations in Arusha, only two out of the 126 delegates were women; in **East Timor** there were only two women in the 15-member National Council of Timorese resistance.

"As a woman from **Sierra Leone** who has worked for twenty years bringing warring communities together I am heartened by the attention the Security Council is paying to women's efforts for peace," said Isha Dyfan, another member of the NGO Working Group.

1. The NGO Working Group on Women and International Peace and Security comprises Amnesty International, the Hague Appeal for Peace, International Alert, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
2. The NGO Working Group has brought these issues to the attention of the Security Council through the "Arria Formula," which allows outside parties to petition council members. The NGOs will present their recommendations to the Council on October 23 followed by an open session on October 24

