



# Australian case study of civil society engagement with government on the National Action Plan

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## WILPF Australia submission to the UN Global Study on Women, Peace and Security

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Australia launched its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in October 2012. It is a whole of government document, coordinated by the Office for Women. At the time, the Office for Women was located in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs but is now located within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The departments with current responsibilities under the NAP are:

- Attorney General's Department
- Australian Civil-Military Centre
- Australian Federal Police
- Department of Defence
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

In 2009, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – Australian Section (WILPF Australia) was provided a grant from the Office for Women to carry out community consultations on the development of the NAP. The relevant government consultations were expected to take place in parallel but, did not occur until 2010-11. This disjunct meant civil society was not included in the initial drafting of Australia's NAP. As a consequence, many women's organisations made submissions, both individually and collectively, against a publicly available consultation draft and were subsequently invited to participate in a workshop on the NAP. Unsatisfied with the scale and quality of the engagement, four civil society organisations worked together to organise the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security. These organisations represented the breadth of civil society. One was academic, one supports a key United Nations organisation, one is the peak body for Australian aid and development NGOs, and the other a peace group with strong historical and contemporary contribution to WPS. Those organisations were:

- Australian National University – Gender Institute
- Australian Council for International Development
- Australian National Committee for UN Women
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – Australian Section

The stated objectives of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue are to:

- Elevate the national discussion on Women, Peace and Security
- Showcase the contribution of civil society organisations to the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the context of UNSCR 1325.
- Facilitate effective dialogue between civil society and the Australian Government on Women, Peace and Security in the context of UNSCR 1325.

- Support shadow reporting on the Australian National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.

The method chosen to achieve these objectives was to invite senior leaders from relevant government departments to speak alongside senior leaders of civil society organisations about what their respective organisations were doing to implement the WPS agenda. In so doing, civil society could effectively showcase their contributions to WPS, and reinforce the call for greater and more formalised civil society involvement. Anticipating that senior leaders would not stay longer than their own sessions, the panels were designed to include a range of government and civil society speakers, obliging each to hear what the other was saying.

Panellists were given their questions well in advance and were informed there would be over a hundred attendees. To maximise the speaker acceptances and to set a positive tone for the Dialogue, organisers maintained communication with the relevant desk officers within each department, informing them of the intent of the event, who the other speakers would be and what they were asked to talk about. Organisers also encouraged departmental staff to attend the full day. Half of the participants at the first Dialogue were from a range of civil society organisations, the other half came from each of the government departments responsible for implementing the NAP.

The product of the Dialogue is an Annual Civil Society Report Card on the implementation of Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Report Card is not an in depth piece of academic research, but an attempt to gather civil society views, with some sort of consensus, into a document that is useful for government in enhancing their implementation of the NAP and the WPS agenda more broadly. The first Report Card was launched by the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women. It has been referenced in academic papers and the implementation of its recommendations improved government implementation of the WPS agenda. By the end of the life of the NAP, there should be a set of Report Cards that will provide evidence of Australian civil society investment in WPS and the NAP process, providing justification for greater civil society engagement in the development of the next NAP, with the expectation that Australia's next NAP will have a higher impact than the first NAP.

#### Enclosures:

- 1) [2013 Annual Civil Society Report Card on Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#)

*Photo: Small group discussions at the 2014 Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security (courtesy of Australian National Committee for UN Women)*

