UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, calls for a greater participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, figures on the participation of women in peace negotiations remain worryingly low. Between 1992 and 2011, women made up only 2% of Chief mediators, 4% of witnesses and signatories, and 9% of negotiators. Although there have been visible improvements in some areas, for example in the Colombian context, there is still a long way to go. Research has identified that women face multiple challenges when seeking to find space within negotiations. These predominantly stem from the dominant narrative that portrays negotiations as a masculine domain. This is both problematic from a rights perspective, and also in practical terms. Evidence shows that including women in negotiations tends to result in a more inclusive and comprehensive agreement. Mediation teams can be strengthened by greater gender parity and diversity, leading to a higher propensity for success. Moreover, changes in the nature and complexity of global conflict require a shift towards a transformative approach to conflict resolution, which greater gender parity in international peacebuilding can contribute to.

Although figures continue to remain low, recent years have seen some acceleration in programmatic efforts towards the greater inclusion of women in international diplomacy and security. This is reflected in the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres’ increased emphasis on promoting women in all areas of international peacebuilding. One positive development in this area is the creation of networks of women mediators. These include the Nordic Women Mediators Network, the Mediterranean Women’s Network of Mediators, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, also known as FemWise-Africa, and the, recently launched, Commonwealth Women’s Mediation Network. The strengthening and development of networks of women mediators provides a system of support and mainstreaming that can facilitate women mediators to be more active at all levels. Additionally, networks can assist in developing pipelines of women mediators who can support each other with career development and progression, working to neutralise the barriers that currently prevent women from engaging more fully in high-level international mediation.

Ireland has a unique history in relation to women’s participation in peace negotiations. Moreover, highly skilled Irish women continue to engage in processes of peace mediation, both nationally and internationally. There also exists in Ireland a number of mediation focused institutions that conduct training and engage in processes of mediation. However, there is little coordination across resources in this area or any established network that could raise the visibility of efforts and promote greater participation of women. This public event and expert level roundtable was aimed at taking stock of mediation work on the Island of Ireland and examining some of the challenges and opportunities for women in peace mediation, both nationally and internationally. In addition the workshop was focused on exploring the possibilities of establishing some form of network or consortium within Ireland that can contribute to greater coordination in Ireland’s approach to promoting women’s participation in peace mediation. Additionally, the workshop sort to examine the possibilities for Ireland in connecting more meaningfully with other European or Global networks.

This document provides an overview of the day and a summary of discussion points from the expert round table.
Part 1 – Summary of Public Event

The event was opened by the Conflict Resolution Unit Director, Áine Hearns, who identified how promoting women in peace mediation is one of the priorities for the unit. She also highlighted the important role of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition in the Good Friday negotiations, noting how this was publically recognised by President Michael D Higgins during his recent addresses to the United Nations General Assembly and Colombia University. The welcome presentation was followed by a panel discussion chaired by Dr Walt Kilroy.

Professor Monica McWilliams opened the panel discussion by identifying some of the reasons why women should be included and recognised for their role in peace negotiations. Aside from the position that women have the ‘right’ to be at the table, she noted that having women at the table increases the likelihood of the inclusion of gender sensitive language and important social provisions in the final agreement. She also argued that including women in negotiations can allow for a level of post-conflict transformation and the exposure of peacetime injustices against women. For example, Syrian women involved in peacebuilding don’t want post-war Syria to be the same as pre-war Syria with all of the same injustices – particularly against women. These are issues that are being raised in the ongoing negotiations between Syrian women, for example around matters such as biased inheritance laws.

Problematically, the norm of women’s exclusion continues when governments and armed groups meet up to divvy up power and the spoils of war. It is therefore high time to take note of, not who is at the table, but who is not at the table. Vital issues that will affect the post-conflict environment are discussed in such spaces but frequently this is not an environment that is representative of all stakeholders in the transition to peace. For example, Monica explained how, in the Northern Irish context there was no mention of matters such as reconciliation or integrated schooling before the Women’s Coalition got involved in drafting the GFA. But she highlighted how difficult these inclusions were to get on the table, explaining how, getting their voices heard involved cornering Mo Mowlam, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in the ladies room!

Monica also spoke of her experience of being insulted by negotiators during the GF talks and noted that, while the Chair privately condemning the insults, did nothing to stop it as it was not seen as his role.

Monica also highlighted the importance of recognising the role of civil society advocacy to counterbalance the increasing ‘strong man’ politics that places the system of global governance at risk and is increasingly centred on the securitisation narrative. She noted how the #MeToo campaign and the campaign to repeal the 8th Amendment¹ are a source of hope.

She also spoke of the importance of grassroots networks in building a support base for entering in to politics or positions of influence, and how this support is vital in overcoming some of the risks and challenges that women face in demanding inclusion. For example, in the context of Northern Ireland, members of the Women’s Coalition faced suspicion in addition to reputational and physical risks.

¹ This refers to the recent campaign to relax the laws on abortion in the Republic.
People questioned, “Who are these women?” and “Are they a cult?”. The support network of cross-community women was therefore crucial in navigating such risks and maintaining determination.

The ability to garner support from a diversity of women across Northern Ireland and bring them together for a common cause was key to the success of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition. However, she noted that a successful network does not come from nowhere but requires determination and leadership. Key elements of a successful network include: representation, inclusion, expertise, and role models.

In the Northern Ireland context grassroots women’s networks still exist despite the disbanding of the Women’s Coalition. There are 100s of women’s centres across Northern Ireland that are increasingly connected. Pre-existing networks are often in place but it is important to remember that not all women share the same experiences so there is a need to navigate consensus.

Monica ended her presentation by highlighting the important role of third party governments in high-level negotiations, citing the role of Norway in the Columbian Peace Process talks in Cuba. This, she advocated, is a role that Ireland has the potential to play in its future endeavours in peace making.

Brendan McAllister began by outlining his background in conflict mediation. He explained that he first established the Conflict Mediation Network in 1987, now called Mediation Northern Ireland, which he ran for 16 years. This network was influential in a broad array of mediation, reconciliation activities and training across Northern Ireland. He noted that the simplification of the name over time, reflects the realisation that the jargon used by practitioners often makes little sense “on the street”. He noted, therefore, the problem of practitioner’s language needing to be reflective of broader society in order to develop a connection between practitioners and those who they claim to represent.

Brendan highlighted how there is often a tension between Human Rights campaigners and those that are focused on Peace and Reconciliation. For example, Peace and Reconciliation groups working with the RUC2 were criticised by Human Rights groups. He noted how this is problematic, as good practices need to involve a positive mix of human rights advocacy and a focus on peace and reconciliation.

Brendan also noted the difficulty of mediators often having to ‘collude with evil’. He highlighted the difficulties of a mediator promoting women’s inclusion in a cultural context that is traditionally exclusionary of women. This is a problem that is often faced by western mediators as they can be perceived as imposing a western agenda. He cited negotiations in Libya involving conservative men, who were taken aback when they were told that women must participate. Mediators therefore have to be tactful in engaging negotiating parties with the notion of a gender perspective or women’s inclusion. He noted how these ideas may have to be introduced slowly, and ways of effectively blending the traditional with the modern, need to be established in a manner that takes account of the fact that, no two conflict contexts are the same.

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2 The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was the former police service in Northern Ireland during the troubles.
He also noted that gender sensitive negotiations are perceived at UN level as requiring 30% of the negotiating team to be made up of women. However, this is more an aspiration than a requirement and it should not result in the cancelation of negotiations if 30% women’s participation is not achieved. The quality of the voices and what they bring to the table is more important that quantity of women at the table.

Brendan finally addressed the issue of WPS funding, which he noted is vital in ensuring greater participation of women at the negotiating table. However, he also warned that 1325 funding often does not always factor in the “cultural costs” of including women, such as the provision of escorts for women travelling to talks in a context where the risk for the safety of women involved in negotiations is particularly high. Brendan also highlighted the important role of the current Secretary General of the United Nations in increasing women’s participation in all areas of the UN system. For example, the UN Mediation Standby Team now supports a gender balance.

Dr Catherine Turner spoke of how the women mediators find themselves between two separate professional fields of expertise: mediation experts, and those with expertise in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This means that there are women who are active and experienced mediators but who do not have the gender expertise associated with gender sensitive process design, and there are those with WPS expertise that may focus more on advocacy rather than the practicalities of mediation. Catherine noted that there is a need for greater cooperation between the two fields, as, in order to increase the number of women involved in mediation. She noted that Ireland is in a strong position to do this, having a number of both gender experts and women mediators.

Catherine also focused on the importance of linking the local to the global and the need to create vertical connections between women working in Track I negotiations and those that are focused on Track II and III, often whom go unnoticed. Ireland’s promotion of women in mediation has tended to be driven largely from the gender side, resulting in a tendency to celebrate, rightly, our high profile women campaigners. However, it is also important to recognise our very low profile excellent women mediators.

While noting the importance of highlighting how including women in negotiations improves outcomes, Catherine also warned of the potential risks of only justifying women’s inclusion in terms of potential ‘outcomes’. She noted that such a position may place responsibility for the success of the process on women, meaning that women will bear a disproportionate burden of expectation when they do gain access to a mediation process. There is also an expectation that women speak simultaneously on behalf of all women and only on behalf of women. This is particularly problematic as it assumes consensus between women as women, and also tends to restrict women’s participation to ‘soft’ issues where consensus is easier to reach, excluding them from the ‘hard’ security issues.
Catherine identified 5 useful recommendations in the development of a network. These are:

1. Networks need to be clear what they understand their role to be. Most include a dual function of helping to promote women as mediators as well as amplifying the voice of women in mediation processes. These are complementary goals, but not necessarily the same thing, and networks need to be clear how these aims work together rather than conflating the two.

2. Networks can help to bridge the gap between the professional fields of mediation and women, peace and security. They can help to define the skills necessary to be a good mediator and maintain rosters of suitably qualified women from different professional backgrounds. Networks can help to identify and develop women with mediation expertise in their own countries as a means of increasing the pool of women available for international positions and directly addressing the suggestion that there are simply not enough qualified women for these jobs.

3. The potential benefit of these complementary aims for networks lies in the ability of the networks to more effectively connect women’s advocates and negotiators with women mediators. While the two groups of women remain distinct there is evidence emerging that women as mediators are more likely to ‘hear’ and recognise stories of gendered harms, and as a result to include those harms in the conflict analysis. Fundamentally women lack access to power and influence when it comes to mediation. Their access to high-level processes depends on the willingness of the mediator to include them and to address their concerns in a meaningful way. Too often women are excluded at crucial stages of process design, meaning that they are not fully integrated into the conflict analysis. One potential role for women mediators is to more effectively co-ordinate efforts to link tracks and ensure that the mediation work of women is recognised when official processes are being designed.

4. Most of the new networks are being established on a quasi-governmental basis. While they are administered by non-governmental organisations they benefit from the support of national governments. This makes networks uniquely placed to begin to bridge the divide between women’s mediation work at local and civic society levels with that of intergovernmental bodies. Access to government is crucial to bridge the problematic divide between local and global work that has characterised efforts to increase the role of women in mediation to date.

5. Strong governmental support is also important in advancing more women into high-level mediation. Track II and Track I mediation are different worlds, and promoting women into influential positions within international teams, with regional or international organisations, requires engagement with high-level diplomacy. Thus commitment from States and international organisations is required if meaningful progress is to be made in this area, particularly in the area of multilateral organisations.

The three presentations were followed by a screening of the film **Peacemakers: Wave Goodbye to Dinosaurs**, which charted the formation of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition. It also exposed the vital role that they played during the Good Friday negotiations and the challenges they faced.

These experiences of the Women’s Coalition were further expanded upon in a Q and A session with former members Bronagh Hinds and Monica McWilliams. The film was both emotive and inspiring and there has been a number of enquiries into future screenings.

If you would like to organise a screening, CRU can put you in touch with the filmmaker Eimhearr O’Neill from Fine Point Films to discuss copyright fees. You can also continue to follow the film at #WaveGoodbyeToDinosaurs.
Part 2: Afternoon Roundtable

Overview of Networks Represented or Discussed

**Nordic Network of Women Mediators**

The Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) is a network of women from five Nordic countries who have professional expertise relevant to conflict mediation, peacebuilding and negotiations. Launched in Oslo, NWM network members share a commitment to sustaining peace through the inclusive and meaningful participation of women in all phases of peace processes. NWM is an instrument for the involvement of Nordic women in advocacy and operational engagement in support for peace.

The membership of the network comprises Nordic women with diverse professional experiences, ranging from foreign affairs and international law to multilateral and regional organisations, such as the UN, the EU and the OSCE, and civil society.

NWM network members have expertise on a variety of issues relevant to all phases of peace processes, including mediation, ceasefire arrangements, constitutional reform, civil-military
relations, international humanitarian law, human rights, communications and inclusive strategies. Promoting women in negotiations, mediation and all phases of peace-making is at the heart of the work of the NWM.

The Swedish branch of the Nordic network, were represented at the roundtable and who provided an overview of the Swedish Network of Women Mediators. This is a network of 15 senior women, mainly at the ambassadorial level, who are well qualified in mediation skills. The Swedish government ensures that resources are directed towards training such women. This example challenges the myth that there are no experienced and trained women in this area.

**Mediterranean Women Mediators Network**

The initiative for a Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) aims at fulfilling the need to increase the number of women involved in peacemaking efforts, and at facilitating the appointment of high level women mediators at local and international level. It intends – in particular – to reduce and fill a networking capacity gap in the Mediterranean area. Stability in the Mediterranean is a prerequisite for human security in the entire region. In this particular area, with its complex socio-cultural context, women mediators can bring strategic knowledge and contribute to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

The MWMN will be a catalyst for mediation efforts in ongoing and potential crises and post-conflict stabilization processes and will foster synergies and coordination among existing initiatives. The Network will also strive for a coherent approach, in close cooperation with the UN and the UNDPA managed roster of mediation experts. Its effectiveness will be bolstered through close cooperation with civil society and in particular in synergy with other stakeholders and similar groups active in this field.

The MWMN will consist, in its initial stage, of approximately 40 qualified members from Mediterranean countries. The Network’s geographic scope encompasses the UN Member States of the Mediterranean area, including some lacking a direct outlet to the Sea, which nonetheless belong to the Mediterranean history and culture, as well as Permanent Observers States of the UN.

Represented at the roundtable was Irene Fellin from one of the implementing bodies of the network, Women in International Security (WIIS). She spoke of how the Mediterranean Network seeks to maintain diversity across its members. She noted that the focus is aimed particularly at Track I and Track II mediation and the network seeks to work closely with civil society in capacity building and training.

Although the initiative was launched by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during its Security Council term, the Ministry is only the facilitator. The implementing bodies are, the Italian branch of Women in International Security (WIIS) and Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

**Women Mediators across the Commonwealth**

Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC) is a new network of women mediators, which is being coordinated by the international peacebuilding NGO, Conciliation Resources, with funding from the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The network is designed to be a platform for the peer-to-peer learning of women mediators. It will include at least 50 women peacebuilders from diverse backgrounds and geographic locations across the commonwealth, who play a role in mediating conflicts at a community, national or international-level. Through the project we will develop the capacities of the women mediators by providing training and mentoring opportunities, as well as supporting grassroots women’s peacebuilding work.
We will also influence and learn from international policy and best practice – connecting with existing mediation networks, collating learning and organising events such as a WMC biannual meeting.

**FemWise-Africa**

Launched in March 2017, FemWise-Africa, was one of three initiatives taken by the African Union to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The Network has a Steering Committee, co-presided by Her Excellency Catherine Samba Panza, former President of CAR, and Her Excellency Dr Speciosa Wandira, former Vice President of Uganda. The committee includes as core members: members of the AU Panel of the Wise, their counterparts from the Regional Economic Communities Committee of the Wise, and ten women mediators with proven mediation skills (2 from each region).

Membership of FemWise is open to institutions and individuals and may include women and girls who have served, and aspire to serve, in preventive actions and mediation activities, drawn from a variety of different backgrounds.

The Assembly of FemWise-Africs is made up of all accredited members of the Networks. It is responsible for approving annual work plans and is a regular platform for the exchange of lessons learnt and best practices.

FemWise priorities are:

1. Professionalizing the role of women in preventative diplomacy and mediation at Tracks I, II and III level.

2. Ensuring a channel for women’s meaningful and effective participation in peace processes, including as heads of official high-level mediation missions.

3. Initiating women’s action that will catalyze and mainstream the engagement of women in mediation in line with the African Union’s ‘Agenda 2063’ and the SDGs.

4. Bridging the gap between the three tracks of mediation and synergizing efforts towards inclusive peace processes with sustainable outcomes.

5. Strengthening the mediation interventions of FemWise Africa with the facilitation of Quick Impact Projects and the establishment of local and national peace infrastructures as foundations, and act as a launchpad for medium and longer term initiatives that ensure stability and development.

6. Increase synergies with other Global and European networks.
Organisations Represented

- Kennedy Institute: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/edward-m-kennedy-institute
- Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation: http://glencree.ie/
- TIDES: http://www.tidestraining.org/
- Institute for Conflict Research: http://conflictresearch.org.uk/
- Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin: https://www.tcd.ie/ise/
- School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin: http://www.ucd.ie/spire/
- Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Dublin City University: http://iicrr.ie/
- Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue: https://www.hdcentre.org/
- International Alert: https://www.international-alert.org/
Summary of Roundtable Discussion

**Peace mediation and Conflict Prevention**

The wider concept of peace-building is undergoing revision. The UN is beginning to see it as a phenomenon that applies to all stages in the evolution of a conflict and not just as a phase that comes after a peace settlement. The concept of ‘peace mediation’ needs to keep up with this.

However, problematically, peacebuilding is also being driven by national security concerns, particularly in the responses to high level of conflict induced migration. Some states are reverting to exclusionary tactics inconsistent with principles of rights and equality and it is therefore important to counter trends of securitisation. Networks of peacebuilders and those that promote dialogue and inclusion are well placed to contribute to counteracting these trends.

**Horizontal and Vertical Networks**

The discussion highlighted the importance of networks in building both horizontal and vertical linkages. As Monica McWilliams noted, women have a greater tendency to develop cross-community dialogue and cooperation. Funding partners should take this into account in the allocation of resources and support for capacity building. Networks can play the role of identifying resource gaps and navigating cultural/local sticking points across contentious groups. In addition, networks can encourage vertical dialogue processes or be a source of information for the dissemination of information between the local, national and international.

Caroline Nyaga, in her overview of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue’s, Women at the Table in (Mid-Belt) Nigeria, noted how her programme seeks to build both horizontal and vertical linkages between diverse women. This programme works to provide space for women in local level negotiations, and to provide training for women in negotiating skills and practices of mediation. She noted how the programme has been successful in bringing in a diversity of women from a variety of backgrounds and ages to the negotiating table and in building cross-community networks of women. This is made further effective through providing safe spaces for ‘women only’ meetings. Caroline noted how the project is also striving to develop vertical networks between local, national and regional processes of dialogue. While the programme was initially working in parallel to the national process, they continue to strive towards more substantive input into the national process.

**Including women in a meaningful manner**

The discussion highlighted how important it is to ensure that women are included in a meaningful way not just in a tokenistic manner. It was highlighted that, so often ‘just adding’ women is seen as progress without taking account of ‘which women’ are included and how their participation has contributed to greater inclusion of a gender perspective in the process.

However, it was also noted how cultural beliefs and practices can make the meaningful participation of women evermore difficult, due to a refusal to take women’s voices seriously in predominantly masculine processes of negotiation and peace mediation. It was therefore noted how networks of women can contribute to increasing resilience that ensures that women’s voices are taken seriously. Caroline Nyaga explained how her Women at the Table (WOAT) programme is persistently faced with the challenges that come with local, negative attitudes towards women in the region. Her programme therefore focuses also on building resilience and developing networks of support for those women that are engaged in the programme.
**Government Role**

Chris Coulter explained the importance of the having a research institute closely aligned to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Folke Bernadotte Academy is a government agency that acts as an implementing body for the peacebuilding priorities of Swedish Foreign Policy, despite retaining a level of independence. The Academy is a centre for research, practice and training, conducting resident and ‘in-country’ training programmes and capacity building. Folke Bernadotte is responsible for the coordination of the Swedish Network of Women Mediators, and is the operational partner of the Nordic Network of Women Mediators. Close alignment with government allows for greater allocation of resources to WPS focused programmes in the Academy and, in turn, the effective implementation of targeted programmes.

The priorities of the WPS agenda and women’s inclusion at government level is particularly aided by the Swedish ‘feminist foreign policy’. The shift towards a feminist foreign policy was led by Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström, and aims to ensure that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. The feminist foreign policy supports an integrated approach and requires that all diplomats consider the three Rs in their work: the Human Rights of women and girls, that women are sufficiently **Represented**, and that **Resources** are distributed in a manner that promotes equality and opportunity.

For Sweden the implementation of the WPS agenda overseas, places a priority on working closely with civil society, as well as at the level of high politics, therefore seeking to make linkages between levels that are frequently disconnected. This way of working is facilitated and made more effective through integrated embassies in developing countries that is the norm for Sweden. This allows for development and diplomatic relations to be integrated. It was noted that Ireland also has integrated missions, (i.e. where the political and economic agendas play a key role in the development of aid programmes) and therefore places Ireland in a suitable position to enhance its policy of promoting women in processes of peace mediation at all levels.

**Including Young Women**

The discussion noted the importance of incorporating young women in into mediation networks, or providing opportunities and trainings to young women. Speaking to the Northern Irish context, it was highlighted that women who had worked on mediation and peacebuilding in the pre or post agreement years and who therefore had direct exposure to the conflict context are now aging, including members of the former Women’s Coalition. It is therefore important to pass the knowledge and expertise from these women to a younger generation in order to retain the rich knowledge that currently exists. The creation of an Irish network, it was noted, could provide a platform through which to train and exchange knowledge with younger women.

Caroline Nyaga highlighted how important it is in her programme in Nigeria to engage with younger women as they tend to be enthusiastic and passionate about change. However, Philomena Apiko noted that when a call for applications for accreditation to FemWise-Africa was advertised, some young women did not have the qualifications or prior experience required to apply, despite holding comprehensive knowledge of conflict contexts and having an interest in joining the network. This raises the question of whether networks are locations only for elite women that may remain disconnected to the grass roots. Again this highlights how important it is for networks not to only favour diplomatic, high level candidates to the exclusions of those who have extensive local grassroots, knowledge but may not have recognised qualifications. However, it was also voiced that there is also a danger of networks being too inclusive, to the detriment of expertise and accountability. It was suggested that there should be a certain criteria that should be met to allow someone to define themselves as a mediator and that the balance between inclusivity and
accountability should be carefully navigated. Discussions with FemWise-Africa noted that the current accreditation form will be revised to address shortcomings.

**Gender mainstreaming across programmes**

Beyond just including women, a gender perspective should be incorporated into all areas of peace making and peacebuilding. Stine Lehmann-Larsen from the European Institute of Peace, note that within the EIP, a gender perspective is incorporated into all their programmes as standard. In particular she noted how important it is in programme development to move beyond the notion of women as victims, but focus on women’s roles as agents for change. Taking a similar approach, Naoimh McNamee, from Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation highlighted that the Centre embeds women’s issues within all its work, taking a two strand approach. Greater recognition of women’s voices in peace mediation at all levels, including at the grassroots level, which is so often not acknowledged, can contribute to bringing greater focus toward the roles that women play in processes of change.

**The importance of long-term (often unrecognised) grassroots engagement.**

Participants agreed the importance of continued dialogue as part of long-term peacebuilding as well as from the perspective of conflict prevention. Women can, and do, play a crucial role in sustaining long-term processes of dialogue, but are frequently not recognised for this and commonly do not have access to sufficient resources to support it. Examples from the Northern Irish context are representative of this. In Northern Ireland women continue to work in long-term, multiple processes of cross-community dialogue but funding is becoming increasingly hard to come by. For example, Liza Wilkinson from TIDES who works on mediating important issues around housing segregation and education, and also provides training for local mediators, noted that access to long-term funding is a continued problem.

**Identifying Expertise and Practitioners – Disconnects between the Local and National**

As mentioned before, women who are already practicing peace mediation at Track II or III level, are often not recognised as mediators. Liza Wilkinson from TIDES noted how they work on processes of peace mediation at the grassroots level but would not recognise their work in the technical term of ‘Track III’. Denise Hughes, from the Institute of Conflict Research, also noted how their work at the community level is perceived as disconnected from high-level politics. It was therefore reiterated that a network could build links between all levels.

A lack of recognition of peace mediation practitioners (by other and themselves) can be problematic in the identification of experienced women mediators. For example, Irene Fellin noted that, within the Mediterranean Network’s focus on Track II and III mediators, there have been some difficulties in accessing the names of women who are practicing peace mediation. She noted ‘there is always a list of usual suspects, who are the gender experts that all seem to be speaking to each other, but it is important to draw other women in.’

**Cultural Sensitivity**

One caution raised around the development of another ‘Western network’ is that Western practitioners can be perceived as imposing a western agenda, and not taking account of cultural values. It is therefore vital to ensure culturally sensitivity in all approaches.

On the other hand, Caroline Nyaga noted that, sometimes local women appreciate the fact that internationals have travelled to far to assist them, and therefore are willing to engage, or ‘give them a chance’. However, she also warned against pushing women to do what they are not comfortable
with. Practitioners need to take into account the implications for local women and their families in making themselves visible. It is therefore important to marry expectations to social and cultural realities.

**Diversity in Mediation Teams and Engaging men**

Aside from focusing on ‘just women’ the importance of ‘mixed teams’ was noted. Mixed teams can be more representative and also provides a different ‘sets of ears’. Women may hear things differently than men and vice versa. Liza Wilkinson noted that, as standard, TIDES use mixed mediation teams, one woman and one man, one should also be catholic and the other protestant.

Furthermore, Brendan McAllister noted that there also needs to be a parallel commitment to engage gender issues that produce violent men. He also noted the importance of bringing men into the agenda, otherwise, women end up operating in some kind of ghetto.

**Defining the concepts**

One of the issues that was raised was the matter of whether the term ‘network’ fully captures the objectives of such an entity. An alternative is to conceptualise it as a ‘consortium’ in order to incorporate all aspects of interrelated research, practice and government priorities. A further suggestion was that networks of women mediators, should be conceptualised in a manner that is more closely aligned to a network of women ‘peacebuilders’ so that it does not become disconnected from other areas of peacebuilding and development. However, there were concerns that this could broaden the scope to much and that any ‘network’ should work closely and collaboratively with organisations in the field of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

It was also suggested that the development of networks is a very ‘current’ phenomenon and there was concern around the long-term salience of such entities, or whether they will evolve into something else in the future as trends shift. This concern renders carefully constructed terms of reference and long-term strategic plans of evermore importance in the establishment of a network.

**Research**

It was noted that more work needs to be done within research agendas that ensures linkages to practice in the field. Also it was highlighted that there is not much research on women on mediation and there needs to be greater funding of qualitative research in this area. The development of networks or consortiums, could provide greater engagement and the exchange of knowledge between research and practitioners.

**Importance of a steering committee**

The importance of having a cohesive steering committee was noted as vital in smooth running of a network. Lacking cohesion and consensus at the institutional level, leaves such an entity open to internal tensions and a lack of strategic direction. Irene Fellin, whose organisation, WIIS, acts as the main implementing body of the Mediterranean Network noted that they are currently seeking a more prominent role of a steering committee in order to increase effectiveness.
Summary of Positive Potential of a Network/Consortium of Women Mediators

- A network can be a platform through which to facilitate the diffusion of ideas in order to develop better and more inclusive practices.
- Networks can provide a talent pipeline for qualified women, who may find it difficult to find an entry point into negotiations.
- Networks can ensure an understanding that there are things partners can do that single organisations cannot do. They have the potential therefore to create greater cohesion and possibilities for complementarity.
- Networks can bring a circle of concerns into a circle of influence, aiding possibilities of exposing gender discriminatory practices.
- They can act as a way of empowering women, bringing them together and instilling role models.
- Networks can be important for capacity building and provide access to resources.
- They can act as a platform for support and training.
- Can contribute to interlinking various mediation tracks and contribute to connecting and disseminating knowledge between, local, national and regional peacebuilding agendas.

Summary of Cautions in the Development of a Network

- There was some concern over networks being a waste of resources and a being a talking shop for western gender experts. There is therefore a need for networks to connect to actual practice in order to effect change. Otherwise they run the risk of losing credibility with practitioners.
- It is vital to be cautious that such a platform does not inadvertently cause harm through culturally insensitive programming.
- To ensure a suitable membership that is both inclusive and accountable.

An Irish Network?

Overall there was significant support for an Irish network. Monica McWilliams noted that this would be an ideal time to establish a network as it would align well to Ireland’s SECCO campaign. Bronagh Hinds noted how a North/South network would bring together a diversity of knowledge and practice into a forum that could have positive implications for Ireland’s role in international peacemaking. Liza Wilkinson noted that a network could allow for greater resources for training programs and the ability to retain women mediators, who are often unpaid and therefore cannot sustain their position. Glencree were also very supportive of the creation of a network and noted their willingness to work with the Conflict Resolution Unit on its development. Academic representatives were also encouraging, but there was also notes of caution around its institutional framework and strategic aims, some of which have been outlined above.

Some of the points noted, specifically in favour of an ‘Irish Network’ were:

- The legacy of the Women’s Coalition is important for the legitimacy of such a network, particularly due to the fact that the Women’s Coalition was very representative and it aided sustainability. This places Ireland in an ideal position in the area of lesson sharing in the area of promoting women in peace mediation.
Ireland has a potentially rich mix of technically well trained mediation practitioners in the Republic and experienced Track II and III practitioners in the North. Therefore the expertise already exists and can be tapped into as part of a collaborative project.

A network could be a platform for bringing in younger mediators and could act as a way of passing on knowledge from women involved in the peace process to a younger generation. Currently the youngest women who had worked on mediation in the pre or post agreement years with direct exposure to conflict related mediation is 40. There are of course younger women training in mediation but they are a step removed from the intensity of the work that happened to support the agreement.

Recognition of Irish culture should be recognised as a positive attribute in Irish contributions to peacebuilding. Irish people understand the importance of ‘craic’; of sociability, humour and relationships.

Internationally Ireland has a reputation of being a neutral State and does not come with the baggage of a former colonial power. Its Defence Forces are well respected overseas and have an excellent reputation in the context of the WPS agenda.

There are already in existence respected training institutes on the island of Ireland, who are working on CSDP mediation training. For example the Kennedy Institute at Maynooth University.

It was noted that the Conflict Resolution Unit has a good reputation in promoting best practices and therefore would be an ideal platform through which to establish a network.

We were also reminded that the Mediation Act was passed in Ireland in 2017, which is more focused around family and corporate mediation but it also provides a greater recognition of mediation. This also means that this is the beginning of dialogue lawyers and mediators working together.

If a network on the island of Ireland were to be established, it was reiterated that it should be well planned, with conceptual clarity around the Terms of Reference and a clear implementing strategy so as to avoid it becoming merely a talking shop.

Lastly, Brendan McAllister noted that the correct structures would need to be in place in order to enable good governance, links to the Department of Foreign affairs and Trade and to manage potential rivalries that could otherwise split the constituency. He also noted that it is worth considering whether there may be a need to differentiate between registered members and licensed practitioners as there will be individuals who will want to be members but whose practice or qualifications may not be to a level that can be endorsed. Clarify on such issues could be aided by a cohesive Steering Committee.

Just like men, women play a number of different roles in peace talks. These include negotiators, mediators and expert advisors. The challenge for the new Networks is to work to define more clearly the different roles that women play in mediation and to ensure that these roles are treated as complementary to each other rather than viewing them all through the same lens. In practical terms this means supporting women at different levels and in different roles in peace processes. From the women mediators working at the community level, to women’s coalitions and negotiators, to high level...
women mediators, a joined up and system wide approach to supporting women in mediation could yield better results in the long run. Networks are ideally placed to contribute to this aim.

Dr Catherine Turner, 1st June 2018