

Speech to the Annual Conference of the Consortium on Gender-Based Violence:  
“The Role of Parliamentarians in developing a National Action Plan for SCR 1325”

*Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Comrades,*

*I come to this meeting with a very simple message.*

*To make this National Action Plan a success, to put UN Security Council Resolution 1325 into effect, we need the political will.*

*I am active in a group called AWEPA, the Association of European Parliamentarians With Africa, which began in the early 1980s as a pressure group against apartheid.*

*It is still active to this day.*

*Last month in Brussels, AWEPA held its biggest conference of the year, aiming to combat violence against women in Africa. It focused on two main contexts, Female Genital Mutilation and armed conflicts.*

*Two immensely challenging contexts.*

*But what was different about the AWEPA conference was the heavy presence of politicians.*

*This sounds almost unfashionable – certainly unpopular.*

*But while there were civil society actors, government officials and others, they were outnumbered by members of parliaments, both European and African.*

*This must be the case to make politics work.*

*Civil society actors greatly informed the Brussels conference, medical and peacekeeping experts gave their opinions - and the most moving and harrowing testimonies of women’s suffering in Africa were heard.*

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*But, in the end, it was the politicians who were mandated to go and implement change.*

*We support the consultation process for Ireland’s National Action Plan for Resolution 1325. We support the SMART indicators and, of course, we support a transparent evaluation process.*

*But what we also need is a political evaluation of this process, one that will be ongoing and committed.*

*When we have established the National Action Plan and its Monitoring Plan, who will provide the political scrutiny to see that it is working effectively?*

*Who will be in the best position to demand that it is carrying out real action on the ground, and that it has not become bogged down in endless internal reports?*

*And who will ensure that the Plan has got an adequate budget and sufficient resources to take on its massive political task?*

*The Irish section of AWEPA can offer determined, committed political support to this process.*

*It is incumbent on our members, within the Oireachtas, to see that this plan is implemented effectively and ambitiously. We can be instrumental in developing an Irish checklist for indicators. And more especially – it will be the responsibility of our opposition members to hold the government to account on this matter, and to do so with real energy and vigour.*

*Let me close with some suggestions to make Ireland’s National Action Plan more ambitious and impactful:*

- *We would like to propose that one of the members of the Irish AWEPA section should be co-chair of the National Action Plan’s Monitoring Group. Only then will it have sufficient political strength to hold the Government to account.*
- *I would also like to see that the scope of the Plan becomes more ambitious so that it is not only inter-agency but inter-departmental. For example, what is our Minister for Trade and Enterprise doing to make sure that ‘conflict minerals’, so often the root cause of violence against women in African conflicts, are prevented from entering Ireland?*
- *Finally, the Irish army has some of the most advanced trainers to prevent gender-based violence in situations of conflict. Why are they not being used more extensively? Why are they not being deployed in the Congo before the planned demobilization of UN forces there next year, a situation that threatens even more horrendous, unimaginable consequences?*

*All of these ideas could be provided for by the terms of the Irish National Action Plan, as well as an active role for parliamentarians to travel, oversee and monitor Irish initiatives in situations of conflict abroad.*

*Confronting the historic victimisation of women in conflict is a daunting, mammoth task.*

*And yet this is an era of exposing that reality, of ending centuries and millennia of denial.*

*No less than the historians who have undertaken this work, we are constantly overwhelmed by inspirational tales of leadership and heroism in Africa today.*

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*When we Irish politicians speak to African audiences, we often invoke the memory of Roger Casement and the horrors he exposed.*

*And yet when we look around the Congo today, we see small women’s NGOs saving their victimised sisters, no matter what dangers they face. We see them gathering evidence for lawyers, who one day hope to bring their rapists and attackers to trial. And we see, even in the Congo, that politicians have passed a law that can enable effective prosecution of these rapes and attacks – once they are given the right resources.*

*Surely we must do all we can to support this work?*

*I hope you will help us create the political will to do so.*