

ON OCCASION OF THE UNITED NATIONS 58TH SESSION OF COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN

**Panel Discussion & Film Screening**

# Engaging Women for Resolving Conflicts

Usher in Peace, Disarmament & Development in South Asia



## Panelists

**Ms. Binalakshmi Nepram**, Manipur Women Gun Survivor's Network/Control Arms Foundation of India

**Ms. Maria Butler**, WILPF PeaceWomen Project, USA

**Dr. Angana Chatterji**, University of California, USA

**Ms. Sarah Boyd**, The Gender Agency, Australia

**Ms. Fiona McAlpine**, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network/WILPF, Australia

## Time & Date

12pm-3pm, Thursday, 13 March 2014

## Venue

Conference Hall, Baha'i United Nations Office  
866 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA



**RSVP:** Ms Binalakshmi Nepram: [binalakshmi@gmail.com](mailto:binalakshmi@gmail.com), Ms Fiona J. McAlpine: [fiona.j.mcalpine@gmail.com](mailto:fiona.j.mcalpine@gmail.com)

**Report on**

**Engaging Women for Resolving Conflicts: Usher in Peace, Disarmament  
and Development in South Asia**

**Date:** 13 March 2014, **Time:** 12pm to 3pm, **Venue:** Conference Hall, Baha'i United  
Nation Office 866 United Nations Plaza, New York NY 10017, USA

**South Asia** or **Southern Asia** is the southern region of the Asian continent. South Asia is bounded on the south by the Indian Ocean and on land by West Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. According to the United Nations geographical region classification, Southern Asia comprises the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, southeastern Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. South Asia is home to well over one fifth of the world's population, making it both the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world.

The South Asian region has poor human security indicators, such as female literacy, life expectancy, healthcare, maternal and child mortality and violence against women. Countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan grapple with violent insurgencies, Nepal and Sri Lanka struggle to balance the transition from long periods of conflict. In Bangladesh, the cultures of violence continue to serve as threats to the efforts towards democracy. While in India, terrorism, Maoist insurgency, coercive state action and pervasive conflicts in the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir continue to dominate public discourse. Yet data by the Indian Armed Violence Assessment reveals the above account for only five to ten percent of all violent deaths in the country. The high number of homicide fatalities is attributed to violence stemming from political, caste, religious and gender conflicts.

**Status of Women in South Asia**

Women's role remains weak and insecure in all social, political and economic activities in South Asia. The incidence of gender-based violence in the SAARC region is particularly alarming. While it is estimated that one in every three women is a victim of gender-based violence, in a recent survey on the world's most dangerous countries for women, three South Asian countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, ranked first, third and fourth respectively. The survey revealed a continuum of structural, cultural and direct forms of violence, ranging from lack of access to education, employment, land, healthcare, and nutrition, to high rates of maternal mortality, female infanticide and feticide, forced marriages, domestic violence, dowry deaths, honor killings, trafficking and, sexual harassment and assault.

On 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014 Control Arms Foundation of India, Welthungerhilfe (WHH), in collaboration and support from the European Commission and The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) successfully organized an event on occasion of the United Nations 58<sup>th</sup> session of commission on status of women under the theme *Engaging Women for Resolving Conflicts Usher in Peace, Disarmament, & Development in South Asia*, in New York.

The session commenced with an introductory speech by **Ms Binalakshmi Nepram** Founder Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network, and Secretary General, Control Arms Foundation of India welcoming all the panelists at the event.



**Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Founder, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network and Secretary General, Control Arms Foundation of India, India, speaking at UN Side Event, 13 March 2014**

**Ms. BINALAKSHMI NEPRAM** opened the discussion by giving an overview of the disturbing situation and status of women in South Asia, against the background of the region's prolonged inter and intra-state conflicts and patriarchal nature. She described how in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal, women are the victims of rape, abduction, child marriages, female infanticide, acid attacks, dowry-related murders, honor killing and enslavement. Against the light of the high weaponization of both state and non-state groups in Manipur, the focus of her speech was on disarmament and the inclusion of women in peace negotiation processes. In this

context, she remarked that India is the world's largest weapon importer, accounting for 12% of the world's share and overtaking Saudi Arabia as the biggest foreign buyer of US weapons in 2013. She condemned how India denies the existence of conflict (with Nepal being the first and only South Asian country to adopt the National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 and 1820), as a result of which the application of Security Council Resolution 1325 – which addresses the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women—is circumvented. The latter is however being alleviated by many local initiatives for women on the ground. She furthermore criticized that many South Asian conflicts, such as that in Chittagong, Bangladesh, are left unreported by mass media. She referred to the Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI) and the European Commission supported project *Empowering Women for Peace and Development in South Asia including Myanmar*, which aims at increasing participation of women in decision-making processes and increasing their capacity building.



**Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Founder, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network and Secretary General, Control Arms Foundation of India, India (Left); Ms Maria Butler (Centre), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom PeaceWomen Project, USA and other panelists at UN 58<sup>th</sup> CSW event 13 March 2014**

**Ms MARIA BUTLER** focused on the need for a shift in CSW from military to human security and the links between development and militarism, identifying however a huge resistance as to imbedding disarmament in the development agenda. She accentuated how the post-2015 development agenda cannot keep silent on militarism if we want human rights abuses to be truly addressed. She noted that the MDGs were too simplistic and outcome- instead of root cause-focused, proposing, in an exemplary manner, the inclusion of a specific goal on peace. Subsequently, she underlined the importance of having a monitoring mechanism on Resolution 1325. Praising how activists are trying to fill this monitoring gap, *inter alia* via national action plan tools, she held that this is a piecemeal and not a holistic approach, stressing that gender equality, disarmament and peace must come with accountability. She also referred to the earlier-mentioned Indian resistance to apply Resolution 1325, calling this '*the core of the challenge*' of their work, calling for voices that acknowledge that aforesaid resolution is in fact applicable everywhere. She underscored that nuclear disarmament is a great challenge, and that much work remains to be done to bring disarmament and peace into women's rights, not only in the CSW framework or domestic policy, but much broader, within local networks and communities. She insisted on the importance of shifting the development narrative from aid to tackling root causes, in which the issue of militarism is essential. She ended with calling for the strengthening of the gender equality goal in the post-2015 agenda and the need to take it to a practical level, including goals on disarmament and military spending.

**Ms SARAH BOYD** underlined the importance of women's voices going from the private to the public sphere, merging private and public spheres to raise women's consciousness, collective investment in ensuring that CSW nor the post-2015 agenda remain silent on critical issues of gender equality, peace (keeping), development, disarmament and their intersections, and the importance of CSO's as the ties that bind the foregoing elements.



**Ms Fiona McAlpine, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Australia and Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, India, presenting at UN Side Event, 13 March 2014**

**Ms FIONA MCALPINE** addressed the issues of murder and forced disappearance of women and girls in India and the lack of access to justice, forged evidence and post-mortem reports, and impunity (as a consequence of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in that context. She accentuated that without including disarmament and demilitarization, the CSW is moot, as there can be no development without disarmament, which is also a prerequisite for access to justice. She explained that WILPF aims at breaking down the walls that lock women out of political conversation, peace negotiation and even the UN system itself.



**Panelists and other participants at UN Side Event, 13 March 2014**

Also a short film titled, “**We Shall Find Our Peace**” was screened at the event that depicts the hardships and sufferings happening due to the ongoing conflict situation in the state of Manipur, India and eagerness of the population to promote peaceful environment in the region. The film showed the strength and hope among the Manipuri Women to overcome the hardships and violence in their state.

There were valuable discussions among the panelists and other participants across India, USA, Australia, Pakistan, Bangladesh on Women, Peace and Security, types of violence and discrimination they are facing across the globe. Further discussions were on the possible steps that could be taken for the empowerment of women, their role in conflict transformation, disarmament, and decision-making processes. The event was ended successfully with valuable inputs and suggestions from esteemed Panelists.

***For more information, please contact:***

**Control Arms Foundation of India**

B 5 / 146, First Floor, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi - 110029, India

Website: [www.cafi-online.org](http://www.cafi-online.org) , Phone: +91-11-46018541, Fax +91-11-26166234