

Background Information

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform is an umbrella body of groups with a primary interest in matters of importance to women. It has membership of national and local organisations and generalist and specific bodies. NIWEP aims to facilitate and increase women's contribution to the social, economic and political agendas both domestically and internationally. The organisation was established in 1988. It takes its action at a strategic level, ensuring that women in Northern Ireland participate in and contribute to the debate of women's concerns integrating domestic, European and international agendas. NIWEP facilitates participation in networking, information sharing and policy development.

The main aims of the Platform are:

- ***To ensure that the women in Northern Ireland have a platform through their concerns shape and develop social, economic and political policies at a local, national, European and international level.***
- ***To ensure that women in Northern Ireland understand the work of the United Nations, the European Union and national and local government in formulating gender equality policy and legislation through training and information***
- ***To consult with women at a local level and to prepare recommendations for debate and discussion with government at local, national, European and international level.***

In 1999 as part of the international agenda the Platform applied for, and was awarded, Special United Nations Consultative Status by the Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) which gives the organisation the opportunity to attend and contribute to debates on critical issues at the United Nations. NIWEP is the only NGO in Northern Ireland to hold this award.

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No.	Issue	Relevant Information
1.	UN Security Council Resolution 1325	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Following 30 years of conflict and a number of peace processes (Belfast Agreement – St. Andrew’s Agreement) no provision to incorporate fully UN Security Council Resolution 1325 into the agreement. It was not implemented in any form either at local level in provision of resources to women at decision-making levels. An example is only 18 women elected to the new government out of 108 members. This has left the women’s sector weak in relation to resources after providing the backbone to all communities throughout the conflict.
2.	Women in Prisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ In July 2003 the Human Rights Commission decided to conduct research into the human rights of women in prison in Northern Ireland. The research remit was to examine “the extent to which the treatment of women and girls in custody in Maghaberry Prison is compliant with international human rights law and standards, and in particular with Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.” ❑ Factors contributing to the decision to conduct the research included: the particular interest of the Commission in the rights of detained people; the death of 19-year-old Annie Kelly in Mourne House, Maghaberry in September 2002; the publication of a highly critical Prisons Inspectorate report on Mourne House (the inspection was conducted in May 2002 and the report published in February 2003); and a visit by members of the Commission to Mourne House in April 2003. ❑ Approximately 80% of prison officers allocated to Mourne House were men and it was not uncommon for the night guard duty to be all male. ❑ The research found that serious policy matters with profound implications for the health and welfare of women and girl prisoners were decided on an ad hoc basis ❑ There was no Prison Service policy statement or strategy documentation addressing the particular needs of women and girls in prison, there was no dedicated governor responsible solely for the management of women in prison and no gender-specific training for prison management or officers. ❑ The research found a regime in which women were regularly locked in cells for 17 hours a day,

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		<p>workshops were permanently closed and education classes rarely held.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The high level of security, dating back to the operation of a regime for political prisoners, was inappropriate. For example, women were not permitted to attend education classes, a short distance from their cells, unless escorted by prison officers. ❑ The right of women in prison and their children to a meaningful family life was not respected. Women were restricted to brief periods of unlock during which they could make telephone calls to their children. For nine consecutive days over Christmas women had no evening unlock or association. There was an absence of appropriate arrangements for special or enhanced family visits. The restrictive regime caused unnecessary suffering for women, their children and their families.
3.	Reproductive Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The 1967 Abortion Act was not extended to Northern Ireland and therefore women in Northern Ireland are generally denied access to a service which is provided under the NHS to women living in other parts of the United Kingdom. Although abortion is legally permissible in certain situations in Northern Ireland the Law is very unclear. Rape, incest and foetal abnormality are not grounds for abortion in Northern Ireland. ❑ The lack of clarity re the law has meant that even where the courts in Northern Ireland have permitted termination, there are examples of doctors refusing to carry out the procedure, requiring those women to have to travel to access a service which they are entitled to. It is believed that the stance adopted by the doctors was because of their concern that legal action would be taken against them. ❑ In the previous submission to CEDAW the Northern Ireland Office had stated that there was strong public opposition to changing the law re abortion in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence that this is the case. ❑ This is an issue about the right of women to access a health care service. It is a health policy issue and not a criminal justice issue.

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		<p>Women in Northern Ireland should have equity in terms of access to health services. The high levels of poverty and social security benefit dependence in Northern Ireland exacerbate the difficulties for many women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Discrimination against women in Northern Ireland creates social and economic hardship for women. For many women the cost of travel for abortions results in economic hardship. This is compounded by the practical needs to be completed. ❑ It also results in women from Northern Ireland having terminations at a later stage in their pregnancy. Research by Marie Stopes International (Rossiter, 2001) highlighted the anxiety and immense difficulty experienced by women in Northern Ireland who had terminations in England and confirmed that most of the women surveyed would have preferred to have been able to access services in Northern Ireland
4.	Women and Prison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ In July 2003 the Human Rights Commission decided to conduct research into the human rights of women in prison in Northern Ireland. The research remit was to examine “the extent to which the treatment of women and girls in custody in Maghaberry Prison is compliant with international human rights law and standards, and in particular with Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.” ❑ Factors contributing to the decision to conduct the research included: the particular interest of the Commission in the rights of detained people; the death of 19-year-old Annie Kelly in Mourne House, Maghaberry in September 2002; the publication of a highly critical Prisons Inspectorate report on Mourne House (the inspection was conducted in May 2002 and the report published in February 2003); and a visit by members of the Commission to Mourne House in April 2003. ❑ Approximately 80% of prison officers allocated to Mourne House were men and it was not uncommon for the night guard duty to be all male. ❑ The research found that serious policy matters with profound implications for the health and welfare of women and girl prisoners were decided on an ad hoc basis

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="732 296 1406 506">□ There was no Prison Service policy statement or strategy documentation addressing the particular needs of women and girls in prison, there was no dedicated governor responsible solely for the management of women in prison and no gender-specific training for prison management or officers. <li data-bbox="732 541 1406 667">□ The research found a regime in which women were regularly locked in cells for 17 hours a day, workshops were permanently closed and education classes rarely held. <li data-bbox="732 703 1406 884">□ The high level of security, dating back to the operation of a regime for political prisoners, was inappropriate. For example, women were not permitted to attend education classes, a short distance from their cells, unless escorted by prison officers. <li data-bbox="732 919 1406 1262">□ The right of women in prison and their children to a meaningful family life was not respected. Women were restricted to brief periods of unlock during which they could make telephone calls to their children. For nine consecutive days over Christmas women had no evening unlock or association. There was an absence of appropriate arrangements for special or enhanced family visits. The restrictive regime caused unnecessary suffering for women, their children and their families.