

## **Initiative for Peacebuilding National Workshop in Sierra Leone**

Cluster on Gender

### **National Civil Society Workshop**

(18 March, Freetown)

Following the International Colloquium on Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Peace and Security held in Monrovia on March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, International Alert and Grassroots Empowerment Movement for Self-Reliance (GEMS) hosted a national workshop in Freetown to explore the themes of the Colloquium in relation to Sierra Leone.

The meeting opened up with an overview of the Colloquium proceedings by Frances Fortune of Search for Common Ground. She explained that the Colloquium was a joint effort by the Governments of Liberia and Finland, both headed by female Presidents, to showcase the dynamic leadership of women. Ms Fortune described the high-level of representation, which also included the Presidents of Rwanda and Senegal and emphasised Liberia's achievement of launching its National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

The next presentation focused on the link between UNSCR 1325 and the campaign for women's rights in Sierra Leone. Rosaline McCarthy (Sierra Leone Women's Forum) highlighted the need for anti-discrimination legislation. The ensuing discussion brought to the fore recent incidents of sexual violence that occurred during the political unrest on 16 March 2009. The participants called for the immediate arrest of perpetrators and counselling for victims and their spouses.

Dr. Nemata Walker (50/50 Group) brought the discussion back to the subject of the Colloquium by presenting "The Great Debate," a component of the Colloquium that debated the effect of having women in leadership positions on the advancement of women's rights. While in general, the debate concluded that women leaders had made a difference to promote women's rights, there were still criticisms like the failure to support other women on the road to leadership. For Sierra Leone in particular, participants recommended the formation of a Women's Caucus in the legislature.

Workshop participants then divided into small groups to examine four Colloquium themes as they relate specifically to Sierra Leone. These issues were UNSCR 1325, Women and Leadership, Women and Economic Empowerment, and Women and Migration. Groups identified priorities, brainstormed key actions, and highlighted the relevant actors. Recommendations from the groups are summarised below.

### **UNSCR 1325**

- UNSCR 1325 must be fully implemented by governments.
- The NAP for Sierra Leone should include the prosecution of SGBV perpetrators as one of the key pillars.
- Implementation of UNSCR 1325 would be strengthened through the creation of a gender desk for each ministry.

### **Women and Leadership**

- Society and government must recognise and strengthen rural women's leadership.
- Women in leadership should promote solidarity among themselves and promote other capable women.
- The problem of high illiteracy rates among women must be tackled in order for them to achieve their leadership potential.
- Women in leadership should be in dialogue with women at all levels: grassroots women organisations, rural women, national policy-makers, etc.

### **Women and Economic Empowerment**

- Educational programs should include training on entrepreneurship skills.
- Traditional leaders and local government should ensure access to farmland for women.
- Governments, donors, and civil society leaders must address the problems of high illiteracy rates, lack of available start-up capital, and poor business skills in order to achieve greater economic empowerment for women.

### **Women and Migration**

- In order to address the trafficking of women and children, strategies must take into account the economic and social factors that drive trafficking.
- Given the high frequency of migration from rural to urban areas, special consideration must be made to prevent and address rape and other forms of GBV.