

Mr. Zerihoun:

I thank you, Madam, for this opportunity to address this open debate on the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation in Africa, on behalf of the Department of Political Affairs.

The Secretary-General has made the advancement of women a top priority since he assumed office and has instructed the senior management of the Secretariat to place the issue at the centre of what they do. This system-wide focus signalled the beginning of an important reorientation, informed by the basic fact that women living with conflict have strategic knowledge and networks that can contribute to its resolution. Recent research has also established that women's participation in peace talks facilitates not only the conclusion of agreements and their implementation but — crucially — also the sustainability of peace.

For the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), promoting women's effective participation in conflict mediation and addressing their specific needs in peacemaking efforts has been a priority since the Department undertook 15 women, peace and security commitments in 2010. As many Council members are aware, the Department monitors and reports annually to the Security Council on progress made in implementing these commitments.

As a result of senior leadership and institutional buy-in, combined with a systematic effort to mainstream these commitments in its work, the Department's conflict prevention work has become increasingly inclusive. Since 2012, all United Nations mediation support teams have included women. United Nations co-led mediation processes consult with women's representatives on the delegations of negotiating parties. These positive developments have improved the inclusion of stronger gender-relevant provisions in ceasefires and peace agreements.

To advance these efforts, the Department of Political Affairs has developed a high-level mediation-skills training. Half of the participants are women and the training aims to enhance gender parity and the future character and configuration of international peacemaking. To build institutional capacity, the Department conducts semi-annual training on gender/ women, peace and security. As a result, some 164 envoys and senior mediation actors have taken part in the high-level seminar series on gender and inclusive mediation.

The Department also continues to implement its Joint Strategy with UN-Women on Gender and Mediation. It helps build mediation capacity for envoys and mediation teams by providing gender expertise and training, while UN-Women strengthens the capacity of regional, national and local women leaders and peace coalitions, and supports access opportunities for women in peace negotiations. We also document relevant lessons learned and develop practical guidance materials for mediators. The United Nations Guidance on Effective Mediation and the Guidance for Mediators on Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements are yielding concrete results on the ground, where it matters the most.

We must, however, not forget that despite the concerted efforts of international and regional organizations, as well as of national Governments, to eliminate discrimination and promote the empowerment of women, unequal access and opportunities for women's participation in political decision-making processes persist worldwide. As highlighted by all three peace and security reviews that were undertaken last year, prioritizing prevention and inclusive political solutions has

never been more urgent. It is only by uniting our efforts that we will be able to advance the principles underpinning the Charter of the United Nations.

Peace processes afford unique opportunities for promoting women's effective participation. The United Nations therefore supports regional and subregional organizations by promoting and strengthening regional capacities for inclusive mediation to enable the more effective participation of women at all levels of peacemaking. This cooperation is built on the knowledge that women's effective participation in transformative decision-making processes will address underlying inequalities and social divisions. It also addresses the specific needs of women and helps to incorporate a stronger gender perspective in reconstruction, reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding.

During the past decade, we have sharpened our preventive tools and achieved some progress. The good offices of the Secretary-General, our regional offices and our cooperation with regional organizations have yielded positive results. Today, about 85 per cent of United Nations mediation involves working closely with regional and subregional organizations. To cite but one example, the Department of Political Affairs has been working very closely with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) following the signing of a framework for cooperation between the two organizations in September 2010, focusing on the need to strengthen partnership in prevention, peacemaking and mediation. In close coordination with UN-Women, DPA continues to complement SADC efforts to advance the promotion of the women, peace and security agenda in the region. Additional policy initiatives include the development of a framework for mainstreaming gender into SADC's peace and security architecture and a strategy for combating sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. Regionally, we welcomed the appointment by the African Union, in 2014, of its first Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security.

Our work on elections also underscores the centrality of women's participation in decision-making processes. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel actively enhances the role of women in conflict prevention and political participation. In 2011, the Office started training and building the mediation and negotiation capacities of women and set up a network of 32 women mediators. Those mediators have moved on to build the capacity of other women in the region, and have since contributed to national dialogue processes in Mali and Guinea. The Office also helped advance women's participation in electoral processes in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Togo by supporting the adoption of legislation on gender parity and quotas to help women assume political office.

Noticeable efforts have also been made by the African Union and other partners in the region to ensure that gender is more systematically integrated in electoral processes, including in election observation. It is encouraging to note that currently the average rate of women members of parliament in Africa is slightly above the global average.

To promote women's political participation in Central Africa, the United Nations Office for Central Africa, in cooperation with its regional partner — the Economic Community of Central African States — in 2014 organized a gender workshop on the role of women in electoral processes in the region. That effort has helped the Central Africa region to establish a platform for the

promotion of women's participation in politics. Ahead of elections in Chad next month, the Office is taking steps to facilitate a national political dialogue. A workshop on the participation of women was organized to feed into the broader dialogue with civil society organizations.

The case for inclusive preventive diplomacy is compelling. Experience has shown that, if we are present, with early diplomatic initiatives and by actively engaging civil society — notably women's organizations — with the support of the international community and the necessary resources, we stand a better chance of helping prevent and resolve conflicts and in making political stability and peace more sustainable.

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