

Mrs. Jakubonė (Lithuania): Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the Spanish presidency for convening this open debate. We commend the Secretary-General's dedication to promoting the cause of women. I thank Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and her team for their dedicated work. I also thank Ms. Julienne Lusenge, Ms. Yanar Mohammed and Ms. Alaa Murabit for sharing their experiences with the Security Council today.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), which calls for women's increased participation in peace processes, greater protection from violations of their human rights, improved access to justice, and measures to address discrimination. Today we have to reassess what remains to be done to make our commitments real.

There have been a number of visible achievements over the past 15 years. Thanks to the Justice Rapid Response instrument, there are more trained investigators of sexual and gender-based violence. The increase in the adoption of national action plans illustrates a growing commitment by Member States to implement the women and peace and security agenda. Five out of the 16 peacekeeping missions are led by women, and all multidimensional peacekeeping operations have gender units. However, much more needs to be done, as a real commitment to the women and peace and security agenda continues to suffer from implementation gaps. I would like to underline some of them.

First, much too often, mediation and peace processes remain male-dominated. While women are disproportionately affected by conflict, their critical role in negotiating, keeping and building peace in their communities is often overlooked. In Syria, women's voices remain a minority in attempts at peace talks. In Mali, only five out of every 100 participants in negotiations that led to the Accord on Peace and Reconciliation were women.

What can be done? Education is essential in empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence. Unfortunately, in many conflicts, attacks on schools and the freedom of thought are a common reality. Furthermore, the development of quota systems could, in some cases, provide positive impetus for increased women's involvement. The inclusion of women in Yemen's National Dialogue Conference was instrumental in achieving a commitment that 30 per cent of places in the Parliament must be reserved for women. In Afghanistan, a quota system ensured that 28 per cent of seats in the Parliament now belong to women. That gives them an opportunity to influence major political decisions.

Lithuania has adopted measures to increase women's representation at all levels of governance. Consistent and systematic long-term implementation of gender equality policies and concrete measures, coordination of actions and synergies of all the relevant stakeholders led to a number of concrete results. Women's education rate stands at 90 per cent. Two of the country's highest posts — that of the President and of the Speaker of the Parliament — are currently held by women. Female staff amount to 70 per cent of the public administration.

Our Government will remain a strong advocate for women's representation at all levels of governance, especially in countries recovering from conflicts. Lithuania welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to earmarking at least 15 per cent of all United Nations peacebuilding spending for programmes that further promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

Secondly, the spread of terrorism and violent extremism has had a horrendous impact on the lives of women and girls. While images and stories of Yazidi women being enslaved by Daesh or girls forced to become suicide bombers by Boko Haram capture our emotions, we need to go beyond the perception of women as victims of terrorism. Seeing women as a driving force in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism is crucial. In September, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001), concerning counter-terrorism, chaired by Lithuania, held the first open briefing on the subject with practitioners from the field. Furthermore, as

the global study research demonstrates, countries with relative gender equality are less prone to violent extremism than those where the human rights of women are not protected. Therefore, all United Nations counter-terrorism strategies must be linked with civil assistance and human rights programmes aimed at shaping a different social environment, averting extremism and radicalization and tackling the root causes of terrorism.

Thirdly, sexual abuse continues to cast a shameful shadow over United Nations peacekeeping despite all efforts by the Secretariat and Member States. We must act consistently to implement the zero-tolerance policy with a particular focus on prevention, including predeployment training and integration of gender advisory staff in all United Nations peacekeeping missions. Adequate vetting of personnel would further prevent individuals with a history of abusive conduct or sexual exploitation from serving.

Lithuania ensures that all its personnel deployed in peacekeeping missions receive mandatory training on gender mainstreaming and prevention. We are also committed to ensuring an adequate response should sexual exploitation or abuse occur, that is, bringing

perpetrators to account. We will pursue expanding the involvement of women in peace operations in both the civilian and military fields.

Last but not least, as emphasized in the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/716), women's access to justice remains a considerable challenge. We will not achieve women's empowerment or gender equality if perpetrators of violence against women and girls continue to go unpunished. National capacities to tackle cases of violence against women, including sexual violence and rape, must be strengthened. The international community has to support the capacity- building of Member States as they seek to build independent, impartial and strong judicial institutions.

Lithuania remains committed to supporting national and international accountability mechanisms for the investigation of sexual and gender-based violence and to ensuring that victims are provided with adequate support and redress for the harm they have suffered. The International Criminal Court continues to be an important mechanism in combating sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and should be used vigorously to pursue accountability.

There can be no peace if half of the world's population is left behind. Women are often at the forefront of positive change. The Council has an obligation to act to make sure that this priceless potential is not wasted. In that regard, we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2242 (2015), which will improve the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda on the ground.