

Ms. Quintos Deles (Philippines): History has not failed to remind us about the scars and wounds of war, deeply etched in humankind's soul, with war's trail of blood that always leads to a bleeding woman's doorstep and a weeping child's nightmare. The time has come for all Governments to ensure that women are given a greater role in preventing armed conflict or, once it has broken out, in resolving it and ensuring its enduring and inclusive peace dividends.

In the Philippines, we are now striving to accomplish both. Our current endeavours draw their context from long decades of an internal armed conflict involving various armed fronts, and our current peace agenda involves five peace tables. The signing by the Philippine Government of the comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on 27 March 2014 was historic, not only because it signalled the end of a long-standing war in the Southern Philippines, but also because it is the first agreement of its kind in the world to bear the signature of a total of three women, who accounted for one half of the negotiating panel of the Government and about one fourth of the total number of its signatories. It is the first such agreement to bear the signature of a woman as chief negotiator, Ms. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer.

Moreover, 69 per cent of the secretariat of the Government panel, including its head, and 60 per cent of the legal team, including its head, are women. The heads of those bodies are under the ages of 35 and 30 years, respectively. The Government panel has committed to enforce the right of women to "meaningful political participation and protection from all forms of violence" in its source document, the framework agreement, which yielded concrete, gender-sensitive provisions in the agreement's four annexes, as well as in the draft Bangsamoro basic law, now pending approval in our Congress. Today, women representatives in Congress are among the staunchest champions of the proposed law, while, on the side of the executive branch, a woman co-chairs the joint normalization committee, which oversees multiple security, transitional justice and socioeconomic interventions aimed at ensuring that peace will endure — not only in the law, but on the ground.

In 2010, the Philippine Government adopted our national action plan on women and peace and security, becoming the first country in Asia to do so. Initiated by civil society and peace and women's rights organizations, the Philippine national action plan rests on four pillars. There are two targeted outputs, briefly identified as protection and prevention, and empowerment and participation; and two cross-cutting support processes, namely, promotion and mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation.

The story of the Philippine national action plan may be best told through the metaphor of weaving, more specifically, mat-weaving, which is common to most Asian countries. Just as weaving is not learned overnight, but goes back generations, the Philippine national

action plan benefits from decades of consciousness- raising and organizing on the part of women, peace and human rights advocates. The Philippine national action plan condenses time. But, like a good mat, in which all the fibre strands are pulled tightly together, it also condenses space. Building on civil society's energies, wisdom and experience, it wagers on the Government and its instrumentalities — in a word, the bureaucracy — to be the bearers of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Today, the Philippine national action plan has been anchored and provided a legal basis by Philippine law, led by the Magna Carta of women and recent legislation that has adopted human rights and international humanitarian standards. We also have an earlier law that requires all Government agencies and local Government units to allocate at least 5 per cent of their budgets to a dedicated gender and development fund, thereby ensuring the availability of funds for immediate start-up and mobilization needs.

It has not been left to one agency to implement the national action plan, but rather strands of the Government bureaucracy are woven in with the establishment of a national steering committee, initially composed of the heads of nine Government agencies, to which eight additional agencies were added. They are involved in implementing the Government's PAMANA programme, which provides development and good governance interventions in conflict-affected areas. Altogether, PAMANA operates in over half of our provinces.

From the beginning, we did not want the national action plan to end up as just another document that might be good to read and display on the bookshelf, but is neither implemented nor practiced. In the same way that mats have a history of long, hard and sometimes rough use in Philippine households, we intend for the national action plan to be a felt presence, making a difference in women's lives.

The implementation of the Philippine national action plan is a painstaking process, because we want to cover all of the bases, including policy, planning, implementation and monitoring mechanisms, as well as budget considerations. Modest initial results are being reported. Among the outcomes already being gleaned are the increased presence of women in peace negotiations and the implementation of peace accords, the establishment of women-friendly spaces that provide the necessary measure of private and safe space for internally displaced women and girls in evacuation centres, the adoption of explicit gender-equality policies and mechanisms as an integral part of the governance of the armed forces of the Philippines, culture-sensitive trauma-healing programmes for Muslim women, the inclusion of women and peace and security issues in the training programmes for foreign-service officers, and the plan to establish a dedicated team of public prosecutors for cases of sexual- and gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, local Government units in those areas have been given the means to issue

their local versions of the national action plan, which complements major funding support from their own resources. And, just two weeks ago, we launched the first Government executive course on women and peace and security, in partnership with a leading national university.

The past five years have enabled us to weave a meticulous overlay of legal frameworks, implementation structures, institutional mandates and, of course, as always, personal passions and inclusive and intergenerational intentions. We must ensure that the national action plan that we have begun to weave will endure the forthcoming transition to a new Administration in 2016. Its strands, emanating from strategic programmes of national and local implementing agencies, must be strengthened and enhanced in both protecting and empowering women, with the aim of bringing all Philippine internal armed conflicts to a peaceful, just and lasting end. The national action plan should be useful. It should be durable. It should make a difference one can feel on one's skin.

We join the urgent call for all United Nations States Members to adopt a national action plan and weave it tightly and strongly to truly make a felt difference in the lives of women and children caught in the middle of today's most violent conflicts.