

Mrs. Byaje (Rwanda): I join others in thanking the Kingdom of Spain for having organized this important high-level review of resolution 1325 (2000) on the occasion of its fifteenth anniversary. The choice of this specific topic demonstrates Spain's continued leadership and commitment to the protection and promotion of women's and girls' rights in conflict and post-conflict situations and, more importantly, of its eagerness to move beyond rhetoric to concrete action.

Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General and Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women, all of the high-level Government officials, the members of the Security Council and the members of civil society for their contribution to this debate.

The adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), as well as that of subsequent resolutions, was instrumental in raising our awareness as to the human rights abuses that women and girls are subjected to in armed conflict as well as in settings where insecurity prevails. The current geopolitical landscape in major parts of the world where violent conflicts are raging, coupled with the rise of extremism and terrorism, has worsened the situation and given way to unprecedented, hard-to-contain humanitarian crises in which women are particular targets. They not only suffer all sorts of ill treatment, including rape and sexual violence, but they are also denied their rights and are routinely scorned and abused.

This reality became self-evident for Rwandans when violence reached its peak for the 250,000 rape victims in the genocide against the Tutsi who were left completely shattered and scarred for life. Nevertheless, if there is any silver lining beyond these despicable crimes against humanity, we can say that the lessons learned from the genocide against the Tutsi were instrumental in paving the way for the positive narratives experienced in Rwanda with regard to women's empowerment and the advancement of their status.

Their key role in mending the social fabric in the immediate aftermath of genocide and in promoting peace, unity and reconciliation not only enabled the resurgence of peace and socioeconomic development but also contributed a great deal to the rebuilding of a shattered nation. Today in Rwanda women have taken centre stage in sensitizing for peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes run by the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. They are also highly involved beyond our borders in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, making the nexus between gender equality and international peace and security an inescapable reality.

In addition, although it is believed that no country can fully reach gender equality, Rwanda, driven by strong leadership and unfailing political will to improve the status of women, took some ground-breaking initiatives in the form of commitments that will lead to tackling this ambitious goal. Indeed, enormous strides have already been taken,

ranging from breaking the world record for the highest female representation in a Parliament — at 64 per cent currently — and in other organs, such as the 43 per cent in the Cabinet and nearly 50 per cent in the judiciary, but also in recognizing women as critical actors in prevention, mediation, protection, conflict management and resolution, as well as in reconciliation processes.

Other than the existing political will enabling a favourable policy climate and a gender-sensitive Constitution that respects the principle of gender inclusion, Rwanda now has a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) that was launched in May 2010 by the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion and which sought to strengthen the capacity of women in peace and security processes. In addition, determined to end the scourge of violence against women and girls — the worst assaults to human dignity — Rwanda has adopted a range of policies to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, protect them and severely punish gender-based violence offenders.

At the institutional level, Rwanda's security organs, in collaboration with other Government agencies, local communities and civil society, have launched initiatives to protect and respond to violence that targets women and girls. The one-stop centres, which are shelters run by the national police, offer, inter alia, a wide range of free services for victims of gender-based violence, as do gender desks nationwide — in police stations, army posts and offices of the national prosecution agency — which have been set up to offer gender-sensitive services to victims.

In the international arena, Rwanda is among the leading police-contributing countries for female police and correctional officers in United Nations peace-support and peacekeeping missions. These officers actively contribute to combating and raising awareness on violence against women in the communities they serve. Similarly, during the 2015 peacekeeping summit, Rwanda pledged, inter alia, to deploy an all-women police unit in the United Nations peacekeeping apparatus. Currently, we have 198 female officers; next week 33 more will be deployed to the Central African Republic.

I would like to conclude by noting that this landmark year of the triple review of United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding together with the high-level review of resolution 1325 (2000) will continue spur action worldwide in fulfilling the imperative to better protect women, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations. Rwanda has already embarked on that irreversible path and is committed to developing a holistic approach to conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, mainly by ensuring the active participation by and protection of women.

