

Ms. Bird (Australia):

Australia is appalled by the continuing use of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence in conflict and the targeting of women and girls by extremist groups. The Secretary-General's report (S/2016/822) is clear that, despite progress made on the women and peace and security agenda, there remain many gaps that require immediate action.

Human rights violations against women and girls have continued unabated. The international community must do everything it can to stop that trend. That is why Australia has provided \$6 million to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women and is researching the role women play in combatting extremism so that we can better understand how to tap into the valuable experiences of women to strengthen our approaches.

By harnessing the expertise of civil society organizations on the ground we can be more effective in our efforts to remove barriers and create meaningful opportunities for women to engage equally in all stages of peace processes. Civil society groups represent those whose lived experience is most relevant. In most instances, they existed before the conflict and they will exist after it. That is why Australia, working with partners, established the Global Acceleration Instrument for Women and Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (GAI). The GAI helps women's civil society organizations to contribute to conflict prevention, crisis response, and peacebuilding. We encourage other Member States to support that practical mechanism.

At last year's high-level review (see S/PV.7533), Australia reaffirmed its commitment and set out its actions to progress the agenda on women and peace and security. In that vein, Australia last week announced further humanitarian and stabilization assistance for Iraq following commencement of the operation to retake the city of Mosul. That assistance includes particular support to the women and girls of Mosul for reproductive and sexual health. In addition, Australia recently committed \$220 million in response to the Syria crisis, including dedicated components to address the unique needs of women and girls.

Australia reiterates its support for increasing the participation of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly in staff officer and military observer roles, as outlined in the London communiqué of the United Nations peacekeeping defence ministerial meeting.

I cannot conclude without again voicing our deep concern about sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. We welcome initiatives aimed at prevention, survivor assistance and accountability, and stress again that there is no excuse for these actions, nor excuse for inaction in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. We know that to sustain peace we must include women; not just in our words, but in our actions. And we must accelerate and strengthen practical efforts to place women front and centre in the peace and security agenda.