

Ms. Bailey: On behalf of the African Union, I wish to congratulate and commend the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate. We also wish to thank Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, for her contribution to this debate. We commend all the briefers for their insightful statements, which highlighted their robust commitment to the global agenda on women and peace and security.

Today's debate is taking place at a pivotal moment, when both the African Union (AU) and the United Nations have embarked on a path of institutional reform to better serve and support Member States in their quest for peace and sustainable development for all. Over the years, Member States have reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the agenda of women and peace and security, yet we continue to see a very limited and disproportionate presence of women in peace processes around the world.

The slow progress witnessed in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda is fully recognized by His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, who at the very outset of his accession to the helm of the African Union Commission pronounced very clearly his commitment and determination to advance the gender agenda on the continent, with a primary objective to have concrete actions and results on the ground that impact the lives of women and girls who, for far too long, have and continued to suffer the brunt of violence and conflict.

Building on the 2014 decision of AU Ministers of Gender that, among other things, called for the creation of an association of women in mediation, at its meeting on 13 March, the African Union Peace and Security Council endorsed modalities for the creation of a Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, known as FemWise-Africa, which aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture.

Subsequently, in the spirit of enhancing working relations between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council, this Council received a briefing and endorsed the African Union initiative FemWise-Africa in the context of an Arrria Formula meeting on 27 March. FemWise-Africa was officially endorsed by the AU Assembly of Heads of State on 4 July.

We strongly believe that FemWise-Africa will be a potent tool to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts and will provide a platform for strategic advocacy, capacitybuilding and networking in order to further enhance the implementation of commitments for women's inclusion in peacemaking in Africa. Key priorities of FemWise-Africa include, among others, ensuring a channel for women's meaningful and effective participation in peace processes, including as heads of official high-level mediation missions, and initiating women's action that will catalyse and mainstream the engagement of women in mediation in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

As part of the African Union's effort to build partnerships in enhancing the leadership of women while promoting and supporting Africa's transformation agenda with a focus on governance, peace and stability in order to accelerate the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the African Union Commission and UNWomen, with the support of the Federal Republic of Germany, launched an initiative called the African Women Leaders Network during a high-level women leaders forum for Africa's transformation held at the United Nations from 31 May to 2 June.

At this juncture, Madam President, I wish to thank your delegation for announcing here your Government's support to the African Women Leaders Network. One of the hallmarks of this partnership was the visit undertaken to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the first solidarity mission under the aegis of the African Women Leaders Network. A group of friends of the African Women Leaders Network will be established in New York and will be headed by Her Excellency Mrs. Martha Pobee, the Permanent Representative of Ghana. The African Women Leaders Network will also be officially launched in Africa in February 2018.

It is often said that there is strength in numbers. The recently signed Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security provides yet another window of opportunity for an enhanced partnership between our institutions to strengthen efforts in advancing the women and peace and security agenda. From that perspective, the African Union commends the Secretary-General and welcomes the establishment of his High-level Advisory Board on Mediation and for appointing three prominent African women leaders, namely Ms. Gbowee, Ms. Machel and Ms. Migiro.

In line with United Nations-AU enhanced partnership, the African Union collaborates with several United Nations offices, particularly UN-Women and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. That robust framework of cooperation reflects our mutual efforts to fully empower women as peace agents and to prevent sexual violence in conflict. In that context, our common objective is to ensure joint advocacy and concrete engagement on the ground. This emphasis on ensuring the participation of women and accountability for crimes of sexual violence is a key aspect of prevention, notably through support to national authorities in order to strengthen their rule-of-law response and institutional configurations to implement the women and peace and security agenda.

Before I conclude, allow me to commend and salute the tradition of holding an annual commemorative meeting on the adoption of the landmark resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions. The African Union Peace and Security Council has adopted a similar approach in its endeavour to resolutely advance the women and peace and security agenda. Accordingly, on 31 October, the African Union Peace and Security Council will hold an open meeting on the theme "The role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism in Africa". The African Union Commission remains a key partner and will continue to mobilize its member States and partners to ensure that the women and peace and security agenda remains central in the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.