

**Ms. Sison (United States of America):**

I thank you, Madam President, for chairing and organizing this open debate and I thank Under-Secretary-General Mlambo-Ngcuka for her briefing and her stewardship of UN-Women. I would like to extend a special thanks also to Ms. Paleki Ayang for her briefing on the perspective of civil society. Indeed, I thank all five rule 39 briefers for their very useful perspectives this morning.

Today's debate provides us all with an excellent opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in Africa. Quite frankly, I hope today's session will do much more than that. This debate should also help more women gain positions of leadership and seats at the negotiating table where issues of peace and security are decided, especially as women and girls face more complex and emerging threats, including those posed by the harsh reality of terrorism and violent extremism.

It is undeniable that some progress on the women and peace and security agenda has been made across Africa since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) in 2000. We appreciate the efforts of the 18 African countries that have developed national action plans that seek to institutionalize the greater participation of women throughout government and society. But there is still much work to be done. I would like to suggest three areas where we should redouble our efforts: first, in helping women overcome systemic obstacles to political participation; secondly, in addressing genderbased violence; and, thirdly, in translating the women and peace and security norms established by the Security Council into concrete success in the real world.

When women actively participate at all levels of political decision-making, we know that we are all safer, that our efforts at peacebuilding are stronger and that around the world Constitutions and peace agreements are more inclusive, just and lasting. But women in Africa continue to face, and to overcome, systemic obstacles to their political participation at all levels of decision-making. In February 2013, for example, 11 countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa signed a peace accord to address decades of violence in eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region was a landmark document to be sure. But it was also negotiated and adopted without any women having participated in the negotiations. The technical committees formed to oversee the implementation and the monitoring of the agreement also did not include any women. In March 2013, recognizing the absence of women in the formal process, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region convened consultations with women leaders and civil society groups across the region, seeking to link their community-level effort in building peace to the regional and the national implementation committees. In January 2014, the Great Lakes Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was launched by the Special Envoy, and it provides grants to women's organizations already working to implement peace in the region. We applaud the dedicated leadership by the United Nations and the countries of the Great Lakes region for recognizing that women were missing from the table and for taking the steps necessary to change that.

A second area where we need to re-aim our focus is in identifying and addressing gender-based violence in a systemic way. The long-term success of peace processes depends upon greater respect for human rights and improved prospects for development. Where gender-based violence is a major feature of conflict or has escalated in the aftermath thereof, it poses a unique challenge to

peacebuilding efforts. In other words, it bears repeating that gender equality is a security issue, and thus a strategic imperative for the Council's work. More often than ever before, we are confronted with the unspeakable: the egregious use by violent extremist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, of gender-based violence, not to mention kidnapping and slavery, which are strategically employed to achieve their aims. The abduction of over 250 Chibok girls from a school in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram militants in April 2014 and that militant group's ongoing use of women and girls as suicide bombers remain tragic reminders of how extremist groups are manipulating gender to achieve their ends.

As the international community responds to violence extremist threats, including across Africa, we must ensure that the needs and the perspectives of women and girls most affected by extremist violence are integrated into our larger approach to countering violent extremism. Our efforts to support survivors of gender-based violence across Africa will be incomplete unless we also commit to fighting impunity. It is for that reason that the United States has supported mobile courts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has led to 1,924 trials and 1,336 convictions of gender-based violence since 2009. United States assistance has also supported the training of 5,505 providers of services to survivors, strengthened 1,103 local organizations serving gender-based violence-affected populations and provided 20,125 gender-based violence survivors with a holistic package of legal services.

The third point that I would like to stress today is that the Security Council's active engagement remains absolutely vital in order to achieve real and tangible gains for women yearning to be included in peace processes, even as we recognize that we still have much work to do. A study on assessing women's inclusion and influence on peace processes by the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva revealed that when women have been included in peace processes, as in Burundi, Somalia, Darfur and Kenya in recent years, their inclusion was mainly owing to normative pressure applied by women's groups and their international supporters. Our words and resolutions and debates therefore do have an effect on the ground, where it counts the most. Let me give just one small example of where the engagement of the international community has had a strong impact — actually, not such a small example, but an important example. In Sierra Leone a programme sponsored by the United States to strengthen women's local political participation became a strong vehicle for empowering women during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. The women there leveraged their convening authority to host outreach sessions with health-care providers and local populations on the Ebola response. The effort ultimately yielded important recommendations for community-led Ebola responses, standards that were adapted by the Government of Sierra Leone.

Despite the significant progress we have made in advancing the women and peace and security agenda in Africa, again, there is still that remains to be done. As my Secretary of State, John Kerry said, our goal is as simple as it is profound, namely, to empower half the world's population as equal partners in preventing and resolving conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, violence and insecurity. That is also the commitment that the Council has made, and it is a commitment that we must all strive even harder to fulfil.

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