

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
October 28 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Ms. King, Representative of Australia

Australia welcomes the focus of this open debate on women's participation and role in conflict prevention and mediation. We thank you very much, Madam President, for convening it.

Although the number of conflicts worldwide has fallen since the 1990s, the proportion of civilian casualties has increased dramatically. The toll in terms of human suffering, economic loss and wasted development opportunities has been enormous.

Women and girls are much more vulnerable to the impacts of violent conflict than men, due to the breakdown of social and legal systems when violence occurs and because of inherent gender inequalities. Women frequently bear the brunt of the devastating consequences of armed violence, including sexual violence. But women are not just victims. They are often the key to preventing conflict and violence from emerging, to resolving conflict and to rebuilding societies once guns fall silent.

The Council has consistently recognized the significance of women in preventing, managing and resolving conflict, including as recently as through two important recent resolutions, resolution 2014 (2011) on Yemen and resolution 2009 (2011) on Libya. We welcome that fact. The reality, though, is that women are still largely excluded from the processes that can lead to conflict or make peace. Women represent less than 8 per cent of peace process participants and fewer than 3 per cent of signatories to recent peace agreements. Even when women are included in negotiations, they are rarely present from the start. That means that many defining decisions are made long before women get to the table.

Women have much to contribute to peace. As the Secretary-General has rightly observed, women are crucial partners in shoring up the three pillars of lasting peace — economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy. It is not possible to create a legitimate and durable post-conflict political system that does not include the full and equal participation of women in decision-making. The role of women in economic development must be recognized in order to grow a post-conflict economy. Women, after all, are most likely to be providing direct support to children and extended kinship networks. Bringing the voice of women to the forefront of conflict prevention and mediation work will therefore help build more resilient communities and a more sustainable peace. That is key to the Security Council's work.

Of course, when we talk about conflict prevention we are talking not just about involving women in preventive diplomacy. We also speak of the much broader agenda of ensuring that drivers of conflict do not have the chance to surface. Democratic institutions, the rule of law and economic development are foundations of peaceful societies. We cannot expect such societies to flourish without embracing the role that women play in shaping them.

Recent years have seen several institutional developments to better integrate these matters into the work of the Security Council and the United Nations. The establishment of UN-

Women was a landmark development. We welcome its initial work to take forward the implementation of all the resolutions on women and peace and security. But more can be done. We encourage the Security Council to receive regular briefings from Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, and Margot Wallström, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We welcome the reference in today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2011/20) to briefings by Ms. Bachelet. We hope that both she and Ms. Wallström can brief the Security Council at their initiative and when they regard elements of the women and peace and security agenda as being relevant to country-specific Security Council deliberations.

We also encourage the United Nations to include relevant elements of the women and peace and security agenda in all country- and mandate-specific reports to be considered by the Security Council. It is essential to ensure that the Council takes decisions that are informed by the work and wishes of a community's women.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2011/598*) highlights, concerted efforts are needed at all levels, in particular among those responsible for technical and financial support to national peace processes.

In our own Asia-Pacific region we have seen great improvements in women's capacity to engage in peace processes that affect them. That is also a key focus of our own aid programme in the region. In Indonesia and Nepal, we have supported women mediators, negotiators and advisers to identify and implement strategies for improving women's participation in peace processes. That important work continues to document best practices related to women and peacemaking in the Asia-Pacific region. The United Nations Development Programme network of peace advocates, N-PEACE, is also undertaking important work in Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Nepal. Earlier this month, N-PEACE launched an interactive internet portal to connect peace advocates within and across countries with experts in the field. That facilitates the sharing of strategies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in conflict and post-conflict situations.

At the grass-roots level, we have witnessed the mobilization by women in the Pacific to ensure their voice is heard. For example, FemLINKPacific leads a community and media policy network on women, peace and security in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. Through the production of a wide range of media initiatives, they are empowering women across the Pacific to engage with decision makers at all levels on issues that affect them.

Women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of conflict but can be powerful in ending it and are central to rebuilding a society after conflict. They should be given the opportunity to shape their own future, as we have heard numerous times today. Peace negotiations not only shape the post-conflict political landscape directly, through agreements on justice, power-sharing and constitutional issues, but also indirectly, by lending legitimacy to those represented at the peace table. A properly integrated role for women enhances the prospects of a durable and lasting peace. Clearly this debate has underscored remaining gaps and challenges. We now have a collective responsibility to translate this debate into further action.