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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Advancement of Women

Statement by Ms Tanisha Hewanpola, First Secretary

(Check against delivery)

The shooting last week, by the Taliban, of Malala Yousafzai – a teenage schoolgirl from Pakistan renowned as an advocate for girls' rights – was a stark reminder to us all of the enormity of the challenges and the work that lies ahead of us in achieving gender equality.

Malala's shooting was no accident. She was specifically targeted because she is a campaigner for a girl's right to education.

This is the horrific face of what the fight for gender equality looks like. Without even the loss of life, the fear that it can strike is enough to keep women and girls at home, disempowered and unable to access what opportunities exist. It is insidious.

As the reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteurs make clear, the advancement of women is dependent on the elimination of all violence against women. Whether in public spheres or private homes, women's health and well-being, educational opportunities, economic empowerment and political participation, will only thrive in environments where their safety is guaranteed. Australia, consistent with the Secretary-General's call, is playing its part to eliminate violence against women, both domestically and internationally.

At home, our National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, focuses on prevention. Founded on the principle that living safe and free from violence is everyone's right, but that reducing violence is

everyone's responsibility, the National Plan seeks to raise awareness of violence within the community and to foster the building of respectful relationships. Importantly, the plan recognises the unique experience of children who are exposed to domestic violence, seeking to address their needs and to break the cycle of violence.

Internationally, a key element of Australia's development assistance is aimed at empowering women, expanding opportunity and reducing violence. Prime Minister Gillard's recent announcement of Australia's \$320 million Pacific Gender Equality Initiative will, over the next 10 years, and in partnership with Pacific States, expand women's political, economic and social opportunities, by improving safety for women through better services for survivors of violence, preventing violence, and improving access to justice.

Mr Chair

We all know that violent conflict affects women and girls disproportionately and differently. The interrelatedness of violence against women, and economic, political and social empowerment is at the forefront of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. That is why Australia is a strong supporter of the Security Council's landmark resolution 1325 and related resolutions, which recognise that women's full participation in peace processes can significantly contribute to the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security.

In March, Australia launched our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2018) which integrates a gender perspective into all of our peace and security efforts, protects women and girls' rights, and promotes their participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Australia commends Member States that have developed, or are in the process of developing, national action plans, and strongly urges others to follow suit.

Mr Chair

Trafficking in persons and related exploitative practices are abhorrent crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. All around the world, slavery, servitude and forced labour are, for many women and girls, daily reality. Australia, as part of our Anti-People Trafficking Strategy, and in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on trafficking in women and girls, is strengthening our trafficking legislation to ensure the broadest range of exploitative behaviour is captured and criminalised. This includes introducing new offences for forced labour and marriage. Regionally and internationally, Australia is also active in efforts to combat trafficking, and is proud to co-chair with Indonesia the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime – the pre-eminent cooperation forum on trafficking in the region.

Mr Chair

The UN's ongoing commitment and focus on gender issues is critical to the advancement of women everywhere, and Australia is strongly supportive of these efforts. It is why we support UN Women, and the Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women, and Trafficking in Persons. It is why we are advocates for CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is why Australia's Prime Minister has placed a key focus on gender issues and education in her role as co-chair of the Millennium Development Goals Advocacy Group. And it is why we were so pleased to host UN Women Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, during her visit to Australia in August.

But more can be done.

Australia strongly encourages UN Member States to support regular briefings by Ms Bachelet and the Special Rapporteurs, including in the Security Council, on developments in the area of gender equality and efforts to reduce violence against women. Such occasions not only provide a useful update, especially with regard to the UN's System-Wide Action Plan on gender equality and women's empowerment, but they also ensure that our goal – gender mainstreaming and equality – remains firmly in sight.