

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

Statement by H.E. Ms. Anne Anderson, Representative of Ireland

Madam President,

Ireland associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The award earlier this month of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize to President Johnson-Sirleaf, to Leymah Gbowee and to Tawakkul Karman recognised the importance of encouraging and empowering women to play their full part in working for peace. In its citation, the Nobel Committee recognised the nonviolent struggle of these three women "for the safety of women ... [as well as] for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work". The women, peace and security agenda is a very broad one.

The Secretary-General's present report covers the four themes of prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery. Justifiably, protection issues have received much attention. Special Representative Wallstrom and her team, and their unstinting efforts to help prevent sexual violence in conflict and end immunity for the perpetrators, deserve our full support. We expect to announce shortly a significant Irish financial contribution to her office.

However, as has so often been emphasised, a focus on the way that conflict can victimise women should not lead us to obscure the role that women can play as agents of conflict resolution and recovery – or in the words of the Nobel Committee, “to realise the great potential for democracy and peace that women can represent”.

More than simply a question of the right of women to participate in peace-making or peacebuilding - which of course it is – the report of the Secretary-General acknowledges what women bring to the table, and what their absence implies. Efforts at peace that accord women prominent and active roles have a better chance of successfully addressing key post-conflict issues. The corollary is equally clear: "exclusion of women and a lack of gender expertise in negotiations leads to irreversible setbacks for women's rights... women's engagement in post-conflict governance and women's access to economic opportunity".

While the passage of Resolution 1325 and the four subsequent resolutions represented a paradigm shift in relation to women and conflict, there remains a striking reluctance in many quarters to include women as full and equal partners in peace efforts.

Of the nine peace agreements signed during the course of 2010, only two had provisions ensuring women's rights.

There is a basic design flaw that needs to be addressed. Peace processes in general are not set up to engage non-traditional actors like women's groups or other civil society organisations.

That must change. Processes need to be structured from the outset to draw more fully on non-formal and non-traditional influences where women, woven into the social fabric of societies, have so much to offer.

The mediation phase, when things remain in flux, presents a good opportunity to empower and include such groups. As the Secretary-General points out in his report, it is critical that women peace-builders and mediators are engaged as early as possible in the conflict prevention/resolution cycle.

And not just the inclusion of women negotiators, but more broadly a gender perspective, so that gender is established as a thread running through all major peace-building issues, rather than being parked on its own as a discrete topic. Gender is not a box to be ticked, a nod to political correctness. Its place is not at the end of a long list – it is a concern which should condition the approach from start to finish.

The promise and potential of women peace-builders was evident to a delegation of women Ambassadors, including Ireland's Ambassador to the African Union, that paid a visit to Sudan earlier this year and met with a cross-section of women peace-builders, legislators and IDPs. The delegation's report noted the determination of women to play a full role in conflict prevention efforts and recommended that international organisations take on more responsibility for implementing women, peace and security priorities.

The Arab Spring provides a crucible for addressing the questions of representation and participation of women. Striking and inspirational early roles in Cairo, Benghazi and elsewhere have given way to a sense of women being side-lined. The risks for women are obvious: revolutions begin on the streets but, at a later stage, key decisions may be taken in smoke filled rooms. In that transition, women all too easily lose out: their courage helped to make the revolution but their inexperience of power can allow others to shape the outcomes.

Special Representative Wallstrom has previously referred to the risk that the Arab Spring could turn into a cold winter for Arab women. As these societies and interim governments continue to adjust and to settle, the international community must use its leverage to ensure that democratic changes underway are seen through - and that the full role promised to women is realised.

Madam President,

Our watchwords must be delivery and urgency. Good intentions and solemn commitments are of value only to the extent that they are acted upon.

All of us must step up to the plate:

UN actors – including the Secretary-General, UN Women, DPA, PBSO – all need to sustain and intensify their efforts;

The Security Council should give clear and consistent messages and lead by example; Member States must recognise how far they are falling short in their responsibility to promote full participation of women at all levels in conflict prevention and resolution, and take appropriate remedial action.

Ireland's principal pledge at last year's debate on women, peace and security was to develop, adopt and launch a National Action on Resolution 1325. I am pleased to announce that Ireland has recently adopted a National Action Plan, and that this plan will be officially launched in the coming weeks. The Plan was informed by a cross-learning initiative that brought together women from Timor-Leste, Liberia, Ireland and Northern Ireland to discuss the most critical issues facing women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings. As we implement our National Action Plan, Ireland will continue to listen to the voices of women affected by conflict, to strengthen institutional capacities through comprehensive training of personnel deploying overseas, and to support programmes that promote women's participation.

In their Peace Prize citation earlier this month, the Nobel Committee wrote that "we cannot achieve democracy and lasting peace in the world unless women obtain the same opportunities as men to influence developments at all levels of society". That is not just a worthy sentiment in a citation – it is a bald statement of reality, and one that demands our full and urgent attention.