

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
November 30th 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Anderson Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations.

I would like to thank the delegations of Guatemala and India for preparing and scheduling today's important debate. To respect the time constraints, I will touch on just a couple of points, and circulate a slightly longer written text.

The first point relates to transitions. The Secretary General's report of 2 October bluntly states that "considerable obstacles persist to women's participation and representation in public decision-making in relation to peace and transition processes" (S/2012/732, para. 65). Times of transition are absolutely critical; as a society is being reshaped, opportunities can be either seized or squandered. If such periods of transition are used to comprehensively strengthen women's political and economic participation, the foundations will be laid for more just, more stable and more prosperous societies. The prospect of critical transitional opportunities being squandered should concern us all deeply. And the risks are clearly and visibly there. Although we are witnessing parts of the world, especially the Arab world, undergoing social and political tumult and transformation, when the smoke clears there tends to be one striking constant: women still struggling to secure a place at the table. It would seem that there is a deep-seated reluctance, even more ingrained than fear of authoritarian rulers, to let women play their rightful role in charting the way forward.

The empowerment agenda is not an outsider's agenda; it is one that is arising organically from within those societies. Women, either individually or in civil society organizations, have demonstrated, often at great personal cost, their hunger and passion for change. And we know that change is both necessary and possible. The Secretary-General points out in his report that a combination of strong gender analysis, active efforts by his Special Adviser on Yemen and close engagement with women leaders and groups resulted in the inclusion of gender-specific commitments in the Yemen Transition Agreement.

In its recent statements on women and peace and security, the Security Council has recognized the primary role and responsibility of national Governments. That is indeed true, and we all recognize the importance of national ownership. But national ownership can never become a rationale or alibi for inaction by the rest of us. For example, Member States taking an active role in supporting the Syrian opposition coalition that is trying to organize itself have themselves a responsibility to seek to ensure the adequate representation of women in that opposition.

It may be objected that in the immediacy of a crisis there are other priorities requiring more urgent attention. But there is a clear message in the Secretary-General's report, that is, if a proper role for women is not built in at the key moment, it will become much harder to graft it on later. Women's role and concerns are time and again pushed down the priority list; they become in effect preamble or postscript issues, instead of getting the front-and-centre treatment they need.

To make just a quick point in relation to civil society, the Secretary-General's report makes specific mention of one model for civil society engagement, namely, the election "situation room". It was my privilege recently to co-host at the Irish Mission a panel discussion on the contribution made by the women's situation room to ensuring peace and stability during the Senegalese presidential elections held earlier this year. Ms. Bineta Diop, who addressed the Security Council this morning, was our main speaker. It was immensely encouraging to hear about this participative, bottom-up initiative. In the dynamism and proactive participation of civil society at the grassroots level, empowering and building on the capacities and real-life experiences of local women, the women's situation room is a model to be emulated and replicated widely.

The challenge is to document and disseminate such initiatives in different countries so as to transform single experiences into mainstream policy. The strength of civil society initiatives often lies in their spontaneity and local buy-in; the weaknesses can be in ensuring structure, durability and transferability. The Senegalese experiment was a particularly successful one, and it is encouraging that UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme are working to ensure that it is properly recorded and adapted for use in other situations.

It is evident from the Secretary-General's report that there is a substantial and expanding conceptual infrastructure dedicated to women and peace and security issues. As in so many other areas of United Nations work, the challenge is implementation, implementation, implementation. We need to ensure that fine words in New York translate into

measurable and meaningful results on the ground. These regular Security Council debates are worthwhile insofar as they allow us to make that connection.