

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security  
October 2014, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Ms. Stott Despoja, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.*

Australia thanks Argentina for convening this open debate on women and peace and security, and for drawing the Council's attention to the specific risks and challenges faced by some of the most vulnerable members of society — displaced women and girls. We also thank the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UN-Women and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations for their commitment to implementing the Council's women and peace and security agenda. We also thank the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and Ms. Suaad Allami for sharing with us the extraordinarily harsh realities facing refugee and internally displaced women and girls in conflict.

We commend the Council's adoption today of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/21) focused on these issues.

The world is facing more simultaneous major crises than at any time since the Second World War. Civilians are direct targets in military strategies that aim to wipe out entire populations and to terrorize civilians. Critical civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, is being deliberately targeted. More people are displaced and more humanitarian workers are being targeted than ever before.

Against this terrifying backdrop, it is women and girls who are being disproportionately affected and harmed. As we have heard, of the more than 51 million displaced people around the world, the majority are women and girls. As they flee, many face the risk of violence, human rights violations and abuses, as well as deprivation and discrimination. They face increasing risks of preventable disease as basic services fail under the strain of displacement and crisis. And women's existing vulnerabilities are exacerbated: child, early and forced marriages increase; economic opportunities are undermined, which increases women and girls' exposure to sex or labour trafficking; and girls' education is disrupted at a higher rate than that of boys, affecting their opportunities over their lifetimes.

We must ensure that our responses address women's and girls' specific vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence. We must focus on improving prevention and response efforts, while supporting the efforts of civil society and other human rights defenders, strengthening accountability and access to justice and ensuring access to a full range of services — medical, legal psychosocial and health services, including sexual and reproductive health.

Australia recognizes this is a significant issue, and more practical support on the ground is needed. Since 2013 Australia has provided \$3 million to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to support delivery of the Action against Sexual and

Gender-based Violence Strategy. The Strategy coordinates actors operating on the ground and supports civil society to implement prevention and response strategies. We have also provided \$4 million to strengthening the International Committee of the Red Cross response to sexual violence.

Increased exposure to sexual violence also exposes women and girls to dire health risks. Services that enable the safe termination of pregnancies from conflict-related rape, and access to HIV-testing and counselling services are fundamental to helping survivors of sexual violence restore their lives.

In 2007, Australia supported the establishment of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme in Crisis and Post Crisis Settings — known as the “SPRINT” initiative — and has since provided \$10.2 million to fund the initiative. Only last month, Australia provided \$2 million to the United Nations Population Fund to support hundreds of thousands of women and girls affected by the ongoing violence in Iraq. We have also provided emergency obstetric supplies for 780,000 women in Syria, as well as 57,000 dignity kits and reproductive health services.

Displaced women and girls are not merely victims. Their leadership and participation in preventing and resolving conflict, as well as in reconstructing post-conflict societies, must be harnessed. That includes in refugee camps and displacement settings, where women must play a central role in the design and delivery of gender-sensitive programmes. Over the 2012-2016 period, Australia will provide \$12 million to the United Nations peacekeeping fund. There need to be more projects focusing on women in peacebuilding, particularly women’s participation in political processes and post-conflict planning.

We are still a long way from achieving the target of spending 15 per cent of overall funds on gender equality. More must also be done to ensure that displaced women and girls have legal protections, and that they can remove themselves legally from situations of vulnerability. Citizenship rights must enable nationality to pass from a mother to her children, and women and girls must be provided access to identity documents. To help relocate women and girls from danger, the Australian Government provides specific resettlement avenues through the Woman at Risk programme. Since 1989, Australia has resettled more than 14,500 refugee women through that programme.

The lack of data on displacement, including sex- and age-disaggregated data, affects our prevention and response efforts. As Australia suggested during the Council’s Arria Formula meeting on the protection of internally displaced persons, which Australia convened with Chile in May, peacekeeping and other United Nations missions should be required to monitor and report on displacement-related developments.

In conclusion, next year, as we commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of

resolution 1325 (2000), Australia looks forward to the 2015 High-level Review, which will enable us all to reflect on the progress made, as well as the ongoing challenges in implementing the Council's women and peace and security agenda. We welcome the appointment of Radhika Coomaraswamy, the author of the global study entitled "Women, Peace and Security", and look forward to working with her and the high-level advisory team, as well as to further embedding the women and peace and security agenda in the Council's work.