

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

*Statement by Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*

The Secretary-General is regrettably not in a position to join us today. He has asked me to deliver the following message on his behalf.

“I thank the Security Council, under the presidency of Argentina, for convening this important debate. The Council’s consistent focus on women and peace and security has enabled the international community to move beyond viewing women as only victims of conflict to seeing them as agents of peace and progress. The Security Council is now increasingly addressing the particular concerns of women and involving them in mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

“The immense human and financial cost of conflict is starkly evident in the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. Unprecedented levels of displacement are testing global commitments to addressing the needs of women and girls, ensuring their protection and engaging their participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

“The confluence of crises we face, rather than distracting from the imperative of gender equality, should drive us to do even more to live up to the principles in the Charter of the United Nations and global norms. Squandering the potential dividends of gender equality for peace and development has never been so costly. We must urgently stand against abuses. I am outraged by targeted attacks and human rights violations committed against women and girls, as well as those who defend their rights. I call for immediate action to end impunity in such cases.

“I am also concerned by continued discrimination against women and girls. I call for greater investment in measures to address this problem. Resolution 1325 (2000) set out a bold agenda for achieving gender equality as a prerequisite for peaceful and inclusive societies. Led by UN-Women, the United Nations is striving to realize this vision. Next year’s convergence of major global policy events will offer an opportunity to advance this. The United Nations counts on the active participation of all countries in the upcoming strategic high-level reviews on issues ranging from sanctions to peace operations, peacebuilding and gender equality.

“I also count on broad participation in my upcoming global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, which will include targeted recommendations to accelerate results. I also commend the lead author of the study, Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who is well known to the Council for her energy and excellence. Ms. Coomaraswamy, the Advisory Group and the study’s secretariat will be undertaking broad-based consultations with Governments, academia, civil society and, most importantly, women who have experienced the direct impact of conflict. I encourage all Member States to support that effort. This wide spectrum of challenges provides an undeniable spur to action. I urge the Council to join in responding with urgency and resolve.”

I shall now continue with my own remarks.

It is an honour to address the Security Council, and to present the Secretary-General's report on women and peace and security (S/2014/693). I thank the presidency of Argentina for hosting this debate and for highlighting the challenges faced by displaced women. This is especially timely as we are witnessing the worst levels of displacement since the end of the Second World War.

In my first year as Executive Director of UN-Women, I have travelled to displacement camps in South Sudan and the Central African Republic, and to the Syrian refugee camps in Jordan. Without fail, at every stop I was inspired — albeit in sadness — by women peacebuilders working so hard in dangerous conditions. Ms. Suaad Allami, a leading women's rights advocate from Iraq, will speak on their behalf today and on behalf of displaced and refugee women everywhere.

As we look around at a world in crisis, there is a sense that we are experiencing not simply an increase in violence and insecurity, but a shift in the nature of conflict itself. In more and more parts of the world — Iraq, northern Nigeria, Syria, Somalia and Mali, to name just a few — violent extremists are taking control of territory, and directly threatening and targeting women, girls, and their communities. This is the terror that contributes to the high levels of displacement we are discussing today. Women and girls are forced to marry their abductors and rapists or sold as slaves. Human rights defenders are threatened and killed for speaking out against abuse. Courageous journalists are silenced by violence and death. Teachers, students and front-line service providers are targeted.

And key decisions are still being made behind closed doors, deaf to the voices of those directly affected. Last week, we greeted with cautious hope reports of possible progress regarding the abducted Chibok girls. This week, our hopes were devastated by news that they are not yet to be released. This again highlights the fact that, even after this horrendous event, more women and girls have been abducted.

We must not forget the reasons why they are abducted. We must not forget the horrifying nightmare they face and that so many others continue to endure. During and after conflict, more women die during childbirth, and more girls are forcibly married. Fewer women work and participate in the economy, and fewer girls go to school. Of primary school-age children that are out of school, half live in conflict areas. Only 35 per cent of girls are enrolled in secondary education in these settings. This prompts me to say that, if we did not have so much conflict, we would have made a lot of progress in gender equality. That puts the whole world in danger.

The report of the Secretary-General, which I have the privilege to present to the Council today on his behalf, recognizes advancements made at the normative level over the past year. The Council adopted new resolutions to strengthen women's protection from sexual violence. It reaffirmed the critical importance of women's empowerment and gender equality to international peace and security. Through regional or national action plans, over 80 countries have committed to the women and peace and security agenda. Regional organizations are increasingly appointing high-level envoys dedicated to this issue. In this respect, I particularly want to welcome the appointment of long-time champion for women Bineta Diop as the African Union's first Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security.

The report shows that women's participation and representation in conflict resolution and peace processes have improved. Of the 11 active negotiations co-led by the United Nations last year, eight included at least one senior woman among negotiating delegates. The percentage of peace agreements that commit to advancing the security and status of women and girls has more than doubled since 2011. In the ongoing Colombian peace talks, more than one third of the negotiators are women, and a committee dedicated to gender has been established. Today, an unprecedented six women Ambassadors sit here in the Security Council. All of this indicates progress.

The gains are remarkable. However, we all have to agree that it still leaves us with nearly half of all peace agreements that say nothing about women's rights or needs, and a majority of peace processes where women's minimal presence is an afterthought.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights new initiatives to protect women's rights, new measures to increase women's representation in military and police forces and the milestone appointment of the first female Force Commander of a United Nations peacekeeping mission. But 97 per cent of military peacekeepers are still men.

There is now broad understanding of the importance of women's economic empowerment in post-conflict settings, but peacebuilding and recovery funding still largely ignore women's economic role and under-invests in their livelihoods.

The report also features a recently launched Secretary-General's guidance note on reparations for survivors of sexual violence. That has been a neglected area in our agenda. Reparations are not just about justice, they are about empowerment. Empowered women and girls are the best hope for sustainable development following conflict. They are the best drivers of growth, the best hope for reconciliation and the best buffer against the radicalization of youth and the repetition of cycles of violence. We see that clearly, and with appreciation, in the honour bestowed on Malala as this year's recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize: it is important to affirm girls' role in peacemaking.

The year 2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which laid the foundations for the women and peace and security agenda; the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000); and the beginning of the new sustainable development agenda. That combination of events is an unmissable opportunity to integrate the women and peace and security agenda into broader development efforts. Next October, the Security Council will conduct a high-level review of the women and peace and security agenda, which will be informed by the Secretary-General's global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). UN-Women is proud to be its secretariat. In fact, I am pleased to recognize the study's distinguished lead author, Radhika Coomaraswamy. She is here with us today, as are several members of the high-level advisory group, who are here for the week. We are grateful for their time and dedication. They will together examine progress and challenges in implementing resolution 1325 (2000).

Today's debate provides an opportunity for the members of the Security Council and others to share their assessment, which I am sure the advisory group will listen to attentively. It is also a chance to renew our commitments to the women and peace and security agenda as the global security context shifts, and to adapt accordingly. Before I conclude, let me touch again on today's topic.

Crises in Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia created more than half of the 10.7 million persons newly displaced by conflict or persecution in 2013. The total displaced population now exceeds 51 million people. During the height of the violence in Gaza earlier this year, almost one third of the population was internally displaced. Nearly 2 million people have been displaced by ongoing crises in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. New displacements have been caused by protracted conflicts, such as the one in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and by new ones, such as the one in Ukraine.

The rights, needs, protection and participation of displaced women and girls have been a Security Council matter since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). In subsequent resolutions and in international and regional human rights and humanitarian law it is stated over and over again: the meaningful participation of women in decisions that affect their lives is essential to creating resilient communities. As Nobel Peace Laureate and Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee said during the General Assembly's high-level week last month, "If we exclude women from peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, we will build unbalanced structures, and they will fall."

Yet efforts to empower women with leadership, training and education and access to land and other productive assets are still marginal. Displaced women are often excluded from justice systems, and investments to fix this are still insufficient. Time and time again, women refugees and internally displaced persons suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence, including sexual violence, forced marriages and trafficking.

In resolution 2122 (2013), the Council notes that unequal citizenship rights and asylum processes and a lack of access to identification increase women's risk of statelessness. They suffer exclusion from decision-making and unequal access to education, health, housing, land and property rights. It is time to dramatically improve the situation of women refugees and displaced persons around the world. It is time to renew our commitments and see them through. As we review policies and strategies over the coming months, we should be clear about what sustainable peace and development require in these changed circumstances.

The Security Council faces extraordinary challenges, from the Ebola outbreak — which also has a gender dimension — to the rise of violent extremism and the unprecedented levels of displacement that come with it. We will not overcome those challenges without putting gender equality front and centre in our efforts to maintain peace and security. That is this Council's obligation. It is also our collective test for 2015.

On behalf of UN-Women, I welcome today's debate and look forward to keeping our promises to all women and girls threatened by conflict and violence all over the world.