

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

Statement by H.E. Madame Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Head of UN Women

Excellencies,

It is an honour to address the Security Council and present the report of the Secretary-General (S/2011/598) on women, peace and security. I thank the Secretary-General for his leadership. While noting progress, the report stresses that much more can and must be done to fully engage women in conflict resolution and mediation. As the Security Council has emphasized, women's full participation in peacemaking is fundamental to building peace and security.

This awareness was underlined by the award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to three women champions of peace, justice and democracy: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, her compatriot Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkul Karman of Yemen. This is the first time that the Nobel Committee's citation included a direct reference to Security Council resolution 1325.

For each of the three Nobel peace prize winners this year, there are thousands of women around the world, who persist in their pursuit of peace in spite of massive obstacles.

Their commitment to non-violence and equality can stimulate breakthroughs where there is resistance to change. It is our job – particularly in view of the theme of this Open Debate today – to make sure that doors are opened to women for conflict prevention and mediation.

Excellencies,
Madame President,

The report of the Secretary-General summarizes progress in implementing Security Council resolution 1325 over the past year in the four main areas of prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. A strategic framework is included in this year's report to guide the United Nations' implementation of the resolution up to the year 2020 and strengthen UN system accountability.

In the area of conflict prevention, improvements have been registered in coordinated efforts to prevent conflict-related human rights abuses of women — from increased prosecutions and improved information about security threats to community vigilance efforts.

During the past year, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has displayed determination to tackle impunity and prevent future attacks on women, and the rise in prosecutions for conflict-related sexual violence is having a deterrent effect. To make further progress, the report notes that the fight against impunity must be paired with efforts to empower women so they can sustain the demand for accountability. There is also a need to strengthen the involvement of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in early warning and community conflict prevention systems to make their more effective.

In the area of women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and recovery, the report

calls for further action to open doors and provide seats to women in official and observer roles. As the topic of this year's Open Debate addresses women's participation in mediation, it is crucial that we consider what, concretely, can be done about the low numbers of women in mediation.

The report calls for specific measures and financial incentives by Member States to include women in official delegations. Special envoys and mediators are encouraged to meet with women leaders and peace activists at the earliest possible moment in mediation processes, to hold regular consultations with women's civil society groups as a standard operating procedure, and to share information from these meetings with the Security Council and the Secretary-General.

In the area of protection, the report shows a mixed picture. Missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and Darfur show that protection patrols and community policing within and around camps, as well as escorts for women during livelihood activities such as gathering water and firewood, have helped deter sexual and gender-based violence. Against examples of good practice however, there are continuing reports of human rights violations that reinforce the need to ensure respect of international legal obligations and provide protection to women against atrocities.

Finally in the area of relief and recovery, the report notes improved awareness and responses to the needs of women and girls in post conflict needs assessments, basic service design and delivery, provision of temporary employment, and transitional justice programmes, including reparations programmes. There are good examples to build on, such as the cooperation between the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme in Haiti, which created temporary employment for 240,000 Haitians, 40 percent of them women.

Overall, the UN system is working to increase post-conflict spending on women's empowerment and gender equality to a minimum of 15 percent of post conflict financing within a few years. The Peacebuilding Fund recently issued a 5 million dollar gender promotion initiative, a call for proposals to support women's participation in peacebuilding, and has committed to doubling its spending on women's empowerment by 2012.

Madame President,
Excellencies,

The report points out that a total of 32 countries have produced National Action Plans on resolution 1325, with another 12 anticipating finalization of their Plans soon. And several regional organisations have adopted policies on women, peace and security.

At the United Nations, a set of tools have been developed to better equip the UN system to ensure that women engage in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery, and that stronger protection environments are built for women. UN Women coordinated the production of the strategic framework, which was requested by the Security Council last year to guide the UN's implementation of resolution 1325 in the next decade. It includes a monitoring system and targets for effective coordination and more concentrated impact.

During the past year, focus has been placed on advancing coordination, accountability, and coherence in the implementation of women and peace and security commitments through joint initiatives within the UN system. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Department of Political Affairs for its collaboration on gender and mediation.

I thank the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict for collaboration on early warning and pre-deployment troop training on the detection and prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict.

Work is currently underway with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve attention to crimes against women in transitional justice systems, and also with the Peacebuilding Support Office to strengthen responses to women's needs in post-conflict peacebuilding. In regions around the world, recent "Open Day" country-level meetings between women in civil society and senior UN leaders have generated increased women's participation and contribution to peace and security.

Excellencies,

Looking forward, the report concludes with recommendations for the Security Council's consideration, addressing three broad areas. Firstly, there is a call for targeted actions in situations on the Council's agenda to build women's engagement in conflict resolution and recovery. Secondly, there is a need to improve the information the Council receives on women and peace and security, and thirdly, there is a need for specific catalytic measures by Member States.

I would like to note the active role the Council has played in the last year. All three of the Council's missions in 2010 included consultations with women's groups. Recently the Council produced new or renewed mission mandates that call for specific actions to ensure women's inclusion –and the report encourages more systematic actions of this type.

It also suggests that more such briefings as the one I provided in April would be of value to the Council in furthering implementation of Security Council resolution 1325.

Finally Member States are urged to develop national planning instruments to advance women and peace and security commitments, to devise practical measures to increase the numbers of women in official and observer roles in conflict resolution processes, to increase numbers of women in security, governance, and foreign service sectors, and to invest in women's post conflict recovery and justice needs and reparations.

Madame President,
Distinguished members of the Council,

To conclude I would like to quote a representative of Afghan Civil Society who spoke at the London Conference on Afghanistan last year. She said: "Women's engagement is not an optional extra component of stabilization and recovery; it is a critical precursor to success. Women's empowerment will enable you to deliver long-term stability, democratization, and development."

Excellencies,

If women's participation is essential, not optional, why is it often the missing ingredient in conflict prevention and mediation?

As we go forward, we need determined leadership — by all of us: the Security Council, Member States, Civil Society, and the United Nations, to fully engage women in mediation and conflict prevention. This will advance peace and security and deepen democracy around the world. Thank you.