

Women Too Often Omitted from Peace Processes, Despite Key Role in Preventing Conflict, Forging Peace, Secretary-General Tells Security Council

Date: Tuesday, October 25, 2016.

NGO Working Group Urges Improved United Nations-Civil Society Engagement. Despite the vital role of women in preventing conflict and helping to forge peace, they were far too often prevented from participating fully in peacemaking processes to the detriment of society as a whole, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon told the Security Council today, as it began a day-long debate open on the subject.

He urged Council members to listen to civil society, particularly women's groups, in all deliberations on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and to make peace negotiations more diverse. "In failing to include women and girls in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, we are not only failing women and girls," he said. "We are failing the world."

Reporting on progress made in implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) — the first resolution adopted by the 15-member Security Council to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women — he cited the creation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Still, "I am ashamed of the many atrocities that continue to be committed against women and girls, including by some of our own peacekeepers," he said. "I am angered by the continued political exclusion of women."

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, emphasized the need to turn resolution 2242 (2015) into action, pointing out that, among other things, the text addressed the role of women in countering violent extremism and terrorism. Highlighting recent progress achieved, she said the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund had exceeded the goal of devoting 15 per cent of its funding targeted directly at gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, the International Criminal Court had secured its first conviction of a former Head of State for having personally committed rape as an international crime.

Nevertheless, several areas of concern and stagnation remained, she continued. During the first year of the Council's Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security, members had discussed the situations in Mali, Iraq, Central African Republic and Afghanistan, she recalled, noting women were not well represented that in many of those contexts. Women comprised only 13 per cent of the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), she pointed out, stressing that such stark deficits in the Organization's own gender balance could not continue.

Rita Lopidia, Executive Director of South Sudan's EVE Organization for Women Development, spoke on behalf of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, saying that most women in her country were economically disadvantaged, lacked protection, had scant recourse to justice, lived in fear and were at risk of daily rape. Having advocated for the inclusion of women's issues in the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement and for women to participate in all parts of that process, she

said the inclusion of women's issues and the signing of the accord in August 2015 had given South Sudanese women hope, but its implementation was not guaranteed.

She went on to underline that women's voices — not only in South Sudan, but also from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and other conflict areas — must be elevated. The United Nations, particularly the Council and Member States, must significantly improve their engagement at Headquarters and in the field with women representatives of civil society during times of crisis. Despite a commitment made last year, the Council had yet to invite civil society representatives to country-specific consultations, she noted.

During the ensuing debate, in which representative of some 75 Member States and other entities participated, speakers welcomed the progress made in implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2242 (2015), while emphasizing the need to include more women in peace and mediation negotiations and in post-conflict peacebuilding. More women should be recruited into the military and police contingents of peacekeeping missions, from where they could have more positive interactions with local populations, especially women. They urged the Council to include gender-specific language in all its resolutions on peacekeeping and asked for adequate funding to implement the women, peace and security agenda.

Liechtenstein's representative cited data showing that women's participation in peace processes increased by 20 per cent the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting at least two years, and by 35 per cent the probability of it lasting 15 years. It was therefore vital to eliminate barriers to women's participation in peace-related activities and to ensure their full inclusion during the formulation and implementation of early-warning systems as well as peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts at all levels.

Colombia's representative said that in her country, which was currently ending the longest-running conflict in the Western Hemisphere, it was understood that women were integral to the quest for peace. The current peace process was the first to explicitly include a gender approach, she said, noting in particular the establishment of a gender sub-commission. Women comprised about half of those consulted in the peace process and the Government had offered reparations for the suffering of women victims, she added.

A speaker representing the African Union said that, so far, the regional bloc's Commission was undertaking a number of activities to empower women, including the establishment of a Network of African Women Mediators; efforts to change narratives on women in recognition of their role in peacebuilding; efforts to mobilize and support Member States and regional economic communities to develop action plans on women, peace and security; and the training of military personnel on women's rights, in line with the African Union's zero-tolerance policy on sexual and gender-based violence.

Deploring violence committed against women and girls in conflict situations — including rape and human trafficking — other speakers called for an end to impunity for perpetrators, with Venezuela's representative emphasizing that it was unacceptable for women and girls to be considered war booty. Uruguay's representative drew attention to the fact that terrorist groups used women and girls for recruitment purposes, also pointing out that girls were disproportionately affected by the lack of education in areas where conflict was prevalent. As

for sexual abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, New Zealand's representative declared: "It is time for an honest conversation between the Secretariat, contributing countries and Member States about why this continues to be a problem, how to stop it, and when it occurs, how to respond."

Vitaly Churkin (Russian Federation), Council President for October, spoke in his national capacity, emphasizing that each conflict situation should be considered on its own merits and that implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) must not be seen as an end in itself. While concurring with the Secretary-General's report on the need to improve implementation of the women, peace and security agenda within the United Nations, he said duplication of efforts should be avoided and national responsibilities prioritized. The Council's focus should be on the situation of women in the largest-scale armed conflicts and those affected by terrorist acts, he said.