

Session 1: Women, peace and security agenda: current trends at the global and regional levels

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I want to start by building on the words of our Executive Director's message in the opening session. This has been, indeed, a special year for our policy agenda. In March, the Commission on the Status of Women reached its first agreement on violence against women since 1998, committing member states to actions that were never before so explicitly articulated in international documents. In April, a new Arms Trade Treaty was adopted, and it requires exporting State parties to consider the risks of arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence. In April, the world's eight richest nations reached a historic agreement to work together to end sexual violence in conflict, and this was followed up by a new Security Council resolution in June and a declaration at the General Assembly, signed by 134 countries so far. In October, the Security Council reasserted the centrality of women's peace leadership and gender equality to international peace and security, and the CEDAW Committee issued its General Recommendation on conflict and post-conflict settings. Only last week, UN Women hosted the first-ever global review of National Action Plans on women, peace and security. 43 countries have adopted one by now, a number that has tripled in the last four years in a progression that shows no signs of slowing down. This has been an extraordinary year in terms of the normative strength of the women, peace and security agenda. And now we are here, in this international conference, joined by so many committed activists and policymakers, to seize this moment and turn it into meaningful change.

We have also seen some historic firsts this year, like the appointment of women to lead mediation processes in the Great Lakes and Darfur. Until this year, the United Nations had never appointed a woman as a chief mediator. We are now seeing what could be described as a new generation of gender-responsive mediation practice from these and other peace leaders, including men. Elements of this new approach include, at a minimum, holding early and regular consultations with women leaders and women's rights groups, securing a gender advisor for the mediation team, and ensuring that crimes against women are addressed in ceasefire and peace negotiations. Every single Commission of Inquiry deployed by the United Nations is fully equipped with an expert on gender-based crimes. This is a commitment of support to the High Commissioner for Human Rights that UN Women made after the horrible mass rapes in broad daylight in the Republic of Guinea in 2009, and we have made good on this promise. And the indicators which we now use to measure progress every year in reports to the Security Council have shown us other positive global trends. For example, almost every mandate to peacekeeping and special political missions of the United Nations now include specific provisions on women, peace and security. Almost every single directive for the police component of these missions now include specific instructions to address women's security. We can now track the amount of spending devoted to gender equality and women's empowerment in peacebuilding and recovery funds, and it is inching up towards the 15 percent target set by the Secretary-General. Gender experts were deployed to 85

percent of UN co-led conflict resolution processes in 2012, a fifty-point jump from only a year earlier, and consultations with women civil society organizations took place in all of them. As a result, more peace agreements and ceasefires are beginning to reflect some of women's main concerns and priorities.

And there are other promising signs in the normative developments of only a few weeks ago. The latest Security Council resolution makes the clearest link between gender equality, and not just women's security, and international peace and security. We have more and more evidence that the larger the gender gap between women and men in a society the more likely that society is to engage in armed conflict and to resort to higher levels of violence in such conflicts. Recent studies are showing us that the treatment of women is a better predictor of state stability and peacefulness than its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity. We should make sure that every policymaker receives this message loud and clear.

The new resolution also recognizes, for the first time in the Security Council, that gender-biased citizenship rights and asylum laws undermine women's security and aggravates women's vulnerability in displacement. It reasserts the need to address the full range of human rights violations against women in conflict, in addition to sexual violence, which is finally being recognized and treated as a priority by peacekeepers, humanitarians, and justice actors. Resolution 2122 also acknowledges for the first time that comprehensive health services are due to women made pregnant due to rape, without discrimination, drawing on the right of access to non-discriminatory health care services for the war wounded under international humanitarian law, and reflecting the recent advocacy push that signals that access to safe abortions should be part of these comprehensive health services for victims of rape. The Security Council asked for the creation of funding mechanisms to build the capacity of women's organizations on the ground, and requested a global study on the implementation of 1325 in preparation for a high-level review in 2015, the 20th anniversary of our last world conference on women in Beijing, and the 15th anniversary of the adoption of 1325.

As many of you know, on the same date that this resolution was adopted, the CEDAW Committee issued its General Recommendation on conflict and non-conflict settings, which helps open a different venue to push these issues in international forums. And it reminds us that the principles and goals of the women, peace and security agenda are not circumscribed only to countries that are already on the agenda of the Security Council, or only to situations of armed conflict under international humanitarian law. It applies also, and I read, "to other situations of concern, such as internal disturbances, protracted and low-intensity civil strife, political strife, ethnical and communal violence, states of emergency and suppression of mass uprisings, war against terrorism and organized crime" as well as "situations of foreign occupation and the post-conflict phase." They apply of course to any country that, although peaceful and stable, is involved in any way in conflict prevention, resolution, or post-conflict recovery in any part of the world, either as a troop contributor to peace operation, a broker of peace deals, or a development and humanitarian donor. It reminds us, in sum, that this mandate is global and concerns us all.

Those are some of the most positive trends, and they are paralleled by the growing assertiveness of those who trumpet women's empowerment and gender equality and say no to violence against women. This year began with mass protests in every major city in India in the wake of a brutal gang-rape in Delhi, replicated later in public revolts against sexual assault in Brazil, South Africa, and other countries. Such levels of global popular mobilization in the wake of individual incidents of violence against women have not been seen before.

And we have to keep up the momentum and these levels of mobilization because there is no shortage of negative and alarming trends as well. Mass atrocities against women and girls occurred in contexts as diverse as Mali, DRC, and Syria. In Afghanistan, women and girls are increasingly targeted because they dare to attend school, or occupy positions of leadership in government, the parliament, or the security sector. The percentage of women in our peace operations, either in the military component or in leadership positions, has stagnated at unacceptably low levels. We still pay insufficient attention and support to women's contributions to conflict prevention, early warning, and security sector reform. We still lack a standard, institutionalized approach of engaging women in post-conflict elections, national dialogues, and international engagement conferences. The percentage of women in ministerial positions and parliament seats actually decreased slightly from last year, something that could be resolved if we were able to support the adoption and implementation of quotas and temporary special measures for women's participation across the board. Our protection and assistance services to women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries still range from inadequate to inexistent, and women's economic security is rarely treated as a priority. Despite their significant role in advancing peace, stability and women's rights in post-conflict settings, women's civil society organizations cannot access enough funds and support. When we compare their level of funding with that of well-known non-governmental organizations, the gap is scandalous.

These are some of the things that need to change and that we will change. Achieving the goal of gender equality set forth in the UN Charter is one of the primary and enduring responsibilities of all Member States. It is our responsibility to open all doors and remove all barriers so that women's leadership and collective action can change the world.