



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9452nd meeting

Wednesday, 25 October 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Vieira	(Brazil)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Spasse
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon	Mr. Onanga Ndiaye
	Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Ms. Zabolotskaya
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates	Ms. Al Kaabi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Women's participation in international peace and security: from theory to practice

Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2023/725)

Letter dated 3 October 2023 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/733)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Women and peace and security

Women's participation in international peace and security: from theory to practice

Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2023/725)

Letter dated 3 October 2023 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/733)

The President: I would like to begin by warmly welcoming the Secretary-General, ministers and other high-level representatives. Their presence at this meeting today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion before the Council.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Tonga, Tunisia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Viet Nam and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Ms. Glivânia Maria de Oliveira, Director General of Rio Branco

Institute, and Representative of Brazil as Guarantor of the Peace Dialogue Table between the Government of the Republic of Colombia and the National Liberation Army; and Ms. Hala Al-Karib, Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Ms. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Her Excellency Ms. Stella Ronner-Grubačić, European Union Ambassador for Gender and Diversity; and Her Excellency Mrs. Nasria Elardja Flitti, Deputy Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/725, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, and document S/2023/733, which contains the text of a letter dated 3 October 2023 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the Secretariat*): I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to brief the Council on this vital issue, and for reminding us of the key contribution Bertha Lutz made to the Charter of the United Nations and to women's rights.

(*spoke in French*)

Many participants here today will have visited the exhibition on display outside the United Nations building. They will have seen the images of the women who embody the agenda we are discussing today — women who are fighting injustice, building peace and taking their rightful place at the negotiation table. It is a snapshot of the immense contribution women are making to peace and security around the world and a testament to the power of women's leadership.

The world must take note, and it must take inspiration, because today we are at the edge of a

precipice. Conflicts are raging. Tensions are rising, coups are erupting, and authoritarianism is on the march. The nuclear threat is growing, climate chaos is inflaming security challenges, and mistrust is poisoning global politics and weakening our ability to respond. The figures on the dire state of our world speak for themselves. Military spending is at a record high, displacement due to violence, conflict and persecution is at a record high, and 50 per cent more women and girls are living in countries threatened by fighting than in 2017. Where wars rage, women suffer. Where authoritarianism and insecurity reign, women and girls' rights are threatened.

We see this around the world. In the Sudan and Haiti, women and girls brutalized and terrorized by sexual violence. In Afghanistan, the denial of women's basic rights is wrecking lives and depriving people of life-saving assistance. In Ukraine, women and girls fleeing Russia's invasion are at risk of being preyed upon by traffickers and abusers. In the Middle East, women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence, bloodshed and forced displacement. Women and girls are among the many victims of Hamas' brutal atrocities, and women and children represent more than half the victims of the relentless bombing of Gaza. Tens of thousands of pregnant women are desperately struggling to access essential healthcare.

(spoke in English)

This grim backdrop gives renewed urgency to efforts to ensure women's full and meaningful participation in peace and security. Twenty-three years after the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000), women's participation should be a default, not an afterthought, but that is not the case. Women are leading efforts on peace, justice and rights around the world. But still, far too many women's organizations struggle to fund their essential work as military spending soars. Far too many perpetrators of sexual violence walk free, and far too many peace processes exclude women. Of 18 peace agreements reached last year, only one was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women's group or organization. Despite our best efforts, women represented just 16 per cent of negotiators or delegates in the peace processes led, or co-led, by the United Nations.

We live in a male-dominated world, with a male-dominated culture. Centuries of patriarchy are a massive obstacle to gender equality and, in turn, to a culture of peace. Around the world, women's rights are

under attack, as are the people who defend them. At least seven women who briefed the Council last year report facing reprisals for having done so. Violence against women, both online and offline, is endemic and a massive barrier and disincentive to participation in civil and political life. At the current rate of progress, it will be almost another half century before women are fairly represented in national parliaments. Addressing this is not a favour to women. It is a matter of rights, justice and pragmatism. Standing with women is good for the world. We know processes involving women lead to more enduring peace. We know gender-equal parliaments are more likely to increase spending on health, education and social protection, and reduce corruption.

There are pockets of hope. This year's report (S/2023/725) shows good practice and success stories on the women and peace and security agenda from around the world — from gender parity in Colombia's peace negotiations to perpetrators of sexual violence in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Central African Republic being brought to justice.

The United Nations is committed to working with countries to drive progress on women and peace and security. Our operations are supporting women, highlighting their vital work and amplifying their voices. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund of the United Nations has supported more than a thousand local women's organizations since it was established in 2016, and we have made progress towards gender balance within peacekeeping missions. But overall, when it comes to women and peace and security, the world must urgently bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality.

This annual debate regularly has the longest list of speakers of the year, but concrete progress is slow, stagnant or even going backwards. We need to implement the women and peace and security agenda in full, now — because women have had enough of being shut out of the decisions that shape their lives, enough of their work going unrecognized, enough of threats and violence, enough of promises left unfulfilled.

Women demand concrete actions to make real strides forward.

First, that means steps to ensure that women are in the room for peace talks. I encourage Governments supporting conflict mediation to set ambitious targets for women on negotiating teams.

Secondly, it means money on the table. If we want to stand with women driving change, if we want to support women enduring conflict, if we want to remove barriers to participation and if we want women's organizations to deliver, we need to pay for it.

Yet the latest figures show aid funding for gender equality in conflict settings falling. I urge countries providing overseas development assistance (ODA), to allocate 15 per cent to gender equality — 15 per cent of funds for mediation work must support women's participation. I also call on countries providing ODA to allocate 1 per cent — at a bare minimum — to direct assistance to women's organizations mobilizing for peace. By the end of 2025, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund Invest-in-Women campaign aims to raise \$300 million. I urge everyone to throw themselves behind that effort.

Thirdly, we need concrete measure to secure women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making on peace and security and all levels of political and civil life. That means pushing for fair representation in national and local Governments, cabinets and parliaments.

I was a prime minister and a leader of a political party. I know that quotas, targets and incentives work. We need robust, comprehensive legislation to tackle violence against women — both online and offline — and to put an end to impunity for perpetrators. And we need to make the most of the Summit of the Future next year to push for progress on women and peace and security. The Summit is a chance to reform and revitalize multilateralism so that it meets the challenges of today. In preparation, the policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace puts women's leadership and participation at the centre of decision-making. I urge the Council to consider its proposals carefully.

Amid a world in chaos, the clock is ticking down to the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). A quarter century is ample time to make progress. We need to translate the energy, commitment and focus in this Chamber into change on the ground and money on the table — no more stalling, no more coasting and no more delays. We need to back the change-makers whose images we proudly display outside this building, starting today. The state of the world demands it. And women and girls, rightly, expect nothing less.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bahous.

Ms. Bahous: It is an honour to present the Secretary-General's annual report on women and peace and security (S/2023/725) to the Security Council. I do so with anguish at the price being paid by women and girls for the alarming spread of conflict, the continued growth of military budgets and the rise of authoritarianism. I do so knowing too well that while horrors and cruelties are being visited on humankind, women and girls remain largely excluded from the ability to make decisions, whether about war and peace, the future of their countries or even about their own bodies. And I do so still hopeful and determined, because the global women's rights movement is never deterred by setbacks, because it only gains adherents and courage with each injustice and because it remains the largest and most reliable constituency for peace.

We meet at a time when the impact of conflict on women and girls has never been starker, and the price we collectively pay through spurning women's leadership has never been more obvious, as millions upon millions suffer the consequences of the wars of men.

As we meet, the Middle East is witnessing a dramatic escalation of violence. To date, more than 1,400 Israelis have been killed by the horrific attacks by Hamas, many of whom are women and children, and an estimated 200 remain as hostages, many of whom are women.

And Gaza has been under devastating, relentless bombardment, killing more than 6,000 people, a majority — 67 per cent — of whom are women and children. UN-Women estimates that, to date, that has resulted in more than 1,100 new female-headed households and has displaced more than 690,000 women and girls from their homes, leaving them at greater risk of violence. But let me be clear — every act of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, is unequivocally condemned, irrespective of the nationality, identity, race or religion of the victims.

We echo all calls for the unconditional release of all hostages, the protection of all civilians, a humanitarian ceasefire and immediate, unrestricted and sustained humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza. In addition, there must be accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and a return to negotiations for a lasting peace for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. That return is best

served by heeding and creating space for the voices of women.

Our focus on the Middle East emphasizes once more the imperative for collective, multilateral action for peace that the Council represents. It has never been more urgent. We will hear later today from Ms. Hala Al-Karib, who will remind us of the crisis in the Sudan and of women's plight there. Her testimony must be heard. Many women in the Sudan and elsewhere, tell us that they feel forgotten and unheard, as conflicts are being displaced from the front pages by new conflicts elsewhere.

The report before us highlights the Secretary-General's call for a critical transformation in women's meaningful participation in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding over the course of this decade. It shares a picture of decline in several countries in the political space for women to participate in decision-making on peace and security — a decline at the very moment when women's leadership is needed most.

Among the five United Nations-led or co-led peace processes in 2022, for example, women's representation stood at only 16 per cent — compared to 19 per cent in 2021 and 23 per cent in 2020. In peace processes led by Member States or other organizations, women were also almost completely absent. That includes in Ethiopia, Kosovo, the Sudan, Myanmar and Libya. Colombia remains a positive exception, as women reached near parity in the new rounds of negotiations.

It should alarm us that, 23 years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we lack an up-to-date, full, transparent, and public accounting of women's representation in peace talks. Even in broad-based national dialogues, where inclusion should be paramount and parity achievable, women's representation fell below 40 per cent, on average, and in some cases, was much lower. Only a third of the 18 peace agreements negotiated in 2022 included provisions on women or gender equality.

The report provides examples of what works, particularly at the local level, where women led successful cross-line negotiations to secure access to water and humanitarian aid, brokered the release of political prisoners, prevented and resolved tribal conflicts and mediated local ceasefires and a halt to violations against civilians. Those examples must be replicated at the national level.

In this report, the United Nations commits to an initial minimum target of women as one third of participants in mediation and peace processes and reaffirms the target of parity in political and electoral processes.

We should acknowledge that women's participation in peacekeeping has increased. This past year, peace operations advanced many achievements. They set up mobile courts to convict perpetrators of gender-based violence in conflict-affected settings; deployed female engagement teams to learn about the situation of women and girls in the most remote areas; helped release and rehabilitate hundreds of women and girls abducted by armed groups; included women in many local peace initiatives and relocated women human rights defenders. Those examples should inspire us. However, as peace operations are withdrawn, the United Nations capacity to monitor and protect women's rights becomes more limited.

We need women's leadership now. Yet, in conflict-affected countries, only 23 per cent of parliamentarians and 20 per cent of ministers are women, both below the global average. I suggest that that is no coincidence. We can increase those numbers with quotas and by tackling political violence against women and gender-based hate speech, both of which are on the rise.

We need women to be safe. The growing number of reparations for survivors of sexual violence and the emerging recognition of gender persecution in national and international courts are positive. Yet the thousands of human rights violations reported in United Nations documents annually still vastly outnumber the successful cases of gender justice.

We need to put gender equality at the heart of resource allocation. Bilateral aid to support gender equality in conflict-affected countries declined in 2021, as we just heard from the Secretary-General. The percentage dedicated to gender equality as a principal objective plateaued at 6 per cent, despite promises to dedicate 15 per cent or more. This failure to finance comes at a time when the ability to reach women and girls, or even employ women in humanitarian delivery, has been challenged in countries such as Afghanistan and Yemen, placing the international community in a cruel dilemma as it seeks to adhere to our humanitarian principles.

It is in that light that the Secretary-General's report calls on Governments to take additional measures to

help women human rights defenders to facilitate the evacuation and relocation of those at immediate risk and set out strategies for long-term support in exile. I am pleased to share that the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund introduced a window for women human rights defenders in 2022 and was able to support 214 women and their 553 dependants within a few months of operation. We need more such action.

Let me highlight five transformative actions so that today's open debate is a milestone, not just a reiteration. I call on all those countries and organizations that support mediation and peace negotiations to take these to heart and to do so with urgency.

First, we must set ambitious and measurable targets for women's direct and meaningful participation on delegations and negotiating teams.

Secondly, we must nominate and appoint women as lead mediators and as mediation experts and make gender balance and the inclusion of gender expertise a norm for mediation teams.

Thirdly, we must earmark a minimum 15 per cent of funds on mediation support to women's participation.

Fourthly, we must track and publicly report in real time on the number and percentage of women directly participating in these peace processes.

Fifthly, we must ensure that gender equality and women's human rights are a central part of peace agreements.

In conclusion, I join the presidency in honouring the memory of Brazilian activist Bertha Lutz, the most prominent advocate for women's rights among the signatories to the Charter of the United Nations. The women's movement owes her a debt of gratitude.

As we speak, around the world and across its crises and conflicts, women continue to risk their lives. They are caring for those around them, trying to carry their families, communities and nations to peace. We can no longer fail to offer them the best support. They are showing us what to do, and I commend their example, as I commend the Secretary-General's report to the Council as motivation, inspiration and a source of determination for change.

The President: I thank Ms. Bahous for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Spoljaric Egger.

Ms. Spoljaric Egger: I thank the Federative Republic of Brazil for convening this important debate. Current developments in the Middle East, but also in other parts of the world, are a shocking reminder of how rapidly humanitarian conditions can deteriorate. The desperate situation we are seeing today is happening on our collective watch. Reprieve must come quickly for all civilians no matter where they are. It is urgent that warring parties maintain a minimum of humanity, even during the worst of war.

All parties to a conflict must, under all circumstances, do their utmost to ensure that civilians are protected and international humanitarian law is strictly adhered to, in particular in their conduct in hostilities and in providing humanitarian relief. Full compliance with international humanitarian law also requires that diverse women, men, girls and boys be equally protected, whether they be civilians, combatants, wounded or prisoners of war.

In conflicts globally, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies consistently recall the rules of war to the parties. The laws are clear — protect all civilians and civilian infrastructure; do not resort to indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks; not take hostages; treat detainees and prisoners of war humanely and allow impartial humanitarian organizations, such as the ICRC, to work unhindered. As an organization mandated to play a neutral intermediary role, the ICRC regularly works with the parties to facilitate their agreement so that civilians can safely cross front lines, people deprived of liberty can be accounted for and released and families separated by armed conflict can be reconnected.

Reflecting on my first year as president of the ICRC, I have regularly seen how women and girls are gravely affected by conflict. Yet the harms they suffer are too often considered marginal, insufficiently understood or addressed. Many violations against women go undocumented and continue to be considered an inevitable side-effect of war. It is the reality of these women that must urgently be addressed — women killed or injured from the reverberating effects of hostilities on health services; women who suffered and survived sexual violence, and those who have not survived it; women who are missing and whose families urgently seek news; wounded and detained women combatants and women recruited by armed groups in non-combatant roles.

Earlier this year, I addressed the Security Council on ICRC's perspective on the gendered impacts of armed conflicts (see S/PV.9276). I now wish to further these messages today and outline three areas for change.

First, we must prevent and address the harms caused by sexual violence. Sexual violence is clearly prohibited under international humanitarian law. And respect for international humanitarian law is an ingredient in achieving lasting peace. There is growing recognition by States and armed forces that any durable peace process must address sexual violence committed during conflicts and prioritize the needs of all survivors. Accountability must be ensured to assist in curtailing repeated patterns of violence.

Sexual violence, however, continues to occur with frequency and impunity. States must therefore adapt their national laws to ensure that sexual violence is always designated as a war crime, provide special measures of protection for victims and survivors and ensure respect for their privacy. Those laws must be known, respected and acted upon by the relevant authorities. And States must increase their efforts to promote restraint in the ranks of their armed forces and those they support.

Secondly, the faithful application of international humanitarian law requires an understanding of the gender-specific harm caused by armed conflict. Women and girls are affected differently by the conduct of military operations, such as in terms of their ability to flee, as they are more likely to care for children, the sick and elderly and may need special consideration; in terms of their access to medical care, as they are likely to have fewer financial resources to cope with injury; and in terms of their access to specialized health services, especially when they are pregnant or giving birth.

ICRC has been working with legal and military experts to understand those impacts so that States can better comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law not to discriminate and to reduce civilian harm. States can fix gender gaps in operational data related to the demographics of civilians, their patterns of life, their power relationships and the risks they face. The participation of local women's organizations that know their communities in that regard is crucial.

Lastly, the full participation of women is critical and is a pathway to peace. Every day, ICRC sees

that, wherever they are able to participate equally and meaningfully in their economies and societies, women — who control assets — yield benefits for the resilience of the whole community and improve the prospects for peace. Complying with international humanitarian law and providing for principled humanitarian action make important contributions to protecting women's lives and dignity, preserving their assets and the essential infrastructure that they rely on and safeguarding cohesion and trust in their societies.

Some crucial humanitarian issues that are experienced primarily by women but that affect entire societies are not being adequately addressed at present. For instance, addressing the issue of the missing and bringing closure to family members is one of the many steps towards trust, reconciliation and stability. I have spoken with women who were the front-line negotiators in the search for their missing relatives. Those women are courageous activists and leaders. Their knowledge and role in influencing and mobilizing their authorities must be acknowledged and respected in peace negotiations.

There are 100 steps to peace, and the first steps are always humanitarian. Without direct input from women, without recognition of the gender-specific impact of armed conflict on women and without an acknowledgment of women's roles in all aspects of their societies, peace responses will fall short — and therefore lack prospects for true stability and security.

The President: I thank Ms. Spoljaric Egger for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. De Oliveira.

Ms. De Oliveira (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to join the Security Council and civil society representatives and to participate in the debate on the issue of women's participation in international peace and security, from theory to practice.

First of all, we must recognize that, 23 years after the historic adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we have made progress towards understanding the issue and incorporating it into the international and national agendas of a growing number of Governments, academia and society in general. Extensive data highlights that women, young people and children — as we heard today — are the main victims of conflict. In circumstances of forced displacement, kidnappings

and rape, deteriorating living conditions and the abandonment of projects and dreams for the future, women have their lives materially, socially and psychologically upended, in a spiral that leaves deep and, more often than not, irreversible traces. Worse still, many of those women end up as part of the grim statistics of fatalities and disappearances.

It is undoubtedly women who pay the highest price for war, and it is also women who, as we know, are more likely to support inclusive forms of governance and coexistence, to favour investing in sustainable development and to opt for funding peace over allocating resources to war. Therefore, in the area of peace and security studies, it is very clear — the observation is simple and obvious. But what of the actual state of affairs? The route from theory to practice remains fraught with visible and invisible obstacles, setbacks or threats of setbacks to advancing the status of women, a worsening of their vulnerabilities and clearly insufficient levels of participation in decision-making processes.

Resolution 1325 (2000) paved the way and provided the necessary tools. It has led to regulatory advances, but the implementation of that standard is not keeping pace. Rhetorical recognition is not enough. While we follow and observe with trepidation — and as the Secretary-General said, we are on the edge of the precipice — the serious and increasing risks to peace and security worldwide, we note that it is still mostly men, or only men, whom we find at negotiating tables. I am reminded of a very simple and frequently used expression: a picture is worth a thousand words. Every day, news broadcasts show us many images of the men who lead wars and at the same time — ironically — the men who negotiate or mediate peace. The images of women that reach us generally present them as victims of tragedies or simply as caregivers in shelters, in their homes and hospitals, facing the pain and despair caused by dynamics that they have neither initiated nor supported.

However, I do not wish to conclude my speech on a despondent note. I bring words of hope and optimism from my experience at the panel for peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). Making progress on the road to peace in Colombia, after decades of conflict, is of vital importance for that sisterly nation and for the entire region. More than that, a negotiating dynamic is being generated from within our Latin America that has the potential to serve as an example to the world.

The differentiated and prominent presence of women in the two delegations at the panel for peace talks with the ELN is a reality. Moreover, that was not — as we know — the first inclusive and diverse experience that Colombia has carried out.

In the process with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), Colombia incorporated a gender perspective that served as a model. It acknowledged the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and effectively incorporated the theme of gender at the negotiating table and in the implementation of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. I would like to mention briefly, for example, the recent opening of Case 11, which will investigate cases of rape and other types of gender-based violence in the framework of the implementation of the 2016 peace process — that is very important.

In the process with the ELN, which I have the honour of supporting and for which opportunity I am very grateful, women are also present as builders and promoters of peace. The State delegation is seeking to ensure parity, with the contribution of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women leaders, human rights defenders, military and police observers, representatives of religious entities and private initiatives, among other entities. On the side of the ELN, women are also present in a significant way.

The historic agreement reached in Mexico at the beginning of the year, which set the final agenda for the negotiations and established that the dialogue will work with a gender and women's rights perspective and will include national and international recommendations and instruments aimed at increasing the participation of women in building and maintaining peace.

After four negotiation cycles, the progress in the dialogue has been encouraging. The parties were able, for the first time, to agree on and implement a 180-day ceasefire, with the intention of it continuing. They also established the National Participation Committee, which has been working, since 3 August, to design of a large consultation process throughout the country. The National Participation Committee — it is important to note — is made up of 30 sectors and 82 members, of whom 38 per cent are women.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sorrow and my solidarity with all the women and girls victims

of past and present tragedies. Today I am thinking about the young women and girls of Israel and Palestine. I am reminded of the words of President Lula da Silva, whom Minister for Foreign Affairs Mauro Vieira recalled yesterday in the debate on the Middle East: “[t] here needs to be a minimum of humanity in the insanity of war.” (S/PV.9451, p.12)

I would also like to pay tribute to the brave Colombian women who have faced the horrors of violence and the pain of loss. I would like to name them to give them a face and to recognize the power of each of them sitting at the dialogue table, which have the honour to support. I am referring to Silvana, Isabel and Consuelo, representatives of the ELN; Claudia and Violeta, peace managers; Olga, Nigeria, Dayana, Rosmery and Adelaida, representatives of the Government; Loreto and Angela from the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia; Marit and Helietta from Norway and Mexico; and lastly, María Paz, who directly supports the Head of the Delegation of the Government and whose name always inspires us at the dialogue table.

I would like to refer in particular to Senator María José Pizarro, Vice-President of the Senate of the Republic and member of the delegation of the Colombian Government. A victim of violence herself, she went into exile at an early age after the assassination, at the age of 38, of her father, Carlos Pizarro, the top commander of the 19 April Movement, who had signed a peace agreement and faced death. Today Senator Pizarro, who has been playing a key role in the process with the ELN and in her work for peace, victims’ rights and the rights of women, youth and ethnic communities in Colombia, shares with so many other women at the dialogue table and beyond a determined struggle for peace. In that process, the Senator is proposing, in dialogue with various platforms of women in Colombia, that we seek to feminize the processes, that we seek creative peace, that the voices of women, who in the various regions of the country have given their hearts and lives to building peace, are heard in the different women’s platforms.

The President: I thank Ms. De Oliveira for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Al-Karib.

Ms. Al-Karib: I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to brief members today.

My name is Hala Al-Karib. I am the Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, a network of about 100 women’s organizations from across the region.

Today’s open debate is an opportunity to reflect on the urgency of this agenda and why women’s rights must be central in addressing any conflict or crisis. Sadly, my country, the Sudan, starkly illustrates the consequences of failing to do so.

The current conflict in the Sudan is the result of decades of violence against civilians, violence that has impacted nearly every aspect of women’s lives. During this time, mass atrocities and violence, including sexual violence and rape, have been used against my people. Those atrocities took place under Omar Al-Bashir, who led a militarized regime reliant on the Sudanese Armed Forces and armed militias such as the Janjaweed in Darfur, which later became the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The mass protests led by women and youth that began in December 2018 and led to the fall of Al-Bashir were, in part, a direct response to how women’s bodies and voices had been systematically under attack for over 30 years. In 2019, the Council heard from Sudanese protester Alaa Salah (see S/PV.8649), whose voice was one of many calling for freedom, peace and justice.

While Al-Bashir was forced out of office by that women-led movement, further change did not come. Transition authorities failed to address the systemic violence, including in Darfur; the repression of protesters; the discrimination against women and the impunity that has plagued the Sudan. Perpetrators, in some instances, were appointed as top Government officials.

The subsequent military takeover illustrates how only paying lip service to the women and peace and security agenda, without insisting on women’s rights and women’s meaningful participation in peace and political processes, is not enough to overcome the repressive patriarchal status quo.

War erupted again in April, this time reaching Khartoum. The gendered nature of the conflict became clear mere hours after the fighting began. The first case of gang rape was reported at noon on 15 April inside a woman’s home in Khartoum. Alerted by her screams, neighbours started gathering and the perpetrators, identified as RSF soldiers, quickly fled. The same day,

two other women were gang-raped inside their homes in the same area.

From that day on, reports of sexual violence and kidnapping flooded human rights and women's organizations. Women were subjected to brutal atrocities, torture and trafficking by RSF in greater Khartoum and in Nyala in South Darfur. RSF's brutality was in full display in El Geneina city in West Darfur, where they raped women from Massalit and other native African tribes in front of their families, whom they then killed. More than 4 million women and girls are now at risk of sexual violence in the Sudan and countless others have been slaughtered.

Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and RSF have committed serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. While calling on both parties to end such acts, United Nations experts have expressed concern at consistent reports of widespread violations by the RSF, including subjecting women and girls to enforced disappearance, sexual assault, exploitation and slavery, forced work and detention in inhuman or degrading conditions. The fear of stigma and reprisals means that we do not even know the full scale of violations. That pattern of widespread, ethnically motivated attacks, including sexual violence, could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. In my view, the targeted attacks on specific communities in El Geneina also pose a serious risk of genocide. After experiencing violence and torture at the hands of the RSF, a number of those women and girl died by suicide. Moreover, women's access to health care, especially comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, is limited, owing partly to a lack of skilled providers and to attacks on and occupations of hospitals.

The war has also resulted in millions of women losing their livelihoods, being displaced and finding themselves desperately dependent on humanitarian aid. Yet a lack of funding and the Sudanese Armed Forces' denials of humanitarian access and imposition of other obstacles have created serious challenges to humanitarians' ability to reach those in need. Furthermore, the delivery of humanitarian aid is rarely informed by women's views, despite their prominent role in the response. The suffering of women in the Sudan mirrors women's suffering across Africa. We are being treated as collateral damage rather than as agents in our own lives. The fundamental premise of the women and peace and security agenda is that relegating women — and their rights — to the margins

of decision-making further entrenches women's exclusion and prolongs violence. That must change now. I therefore urge the Security Council to take the following action.

The Council should demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and the institution of a comprehensive ceasefire in the Sudan aimed at ending all the violence targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. It should emphasize that Sudanese women and civil society are critical to all efforts to make peace. We repeat our demand for the meaningful representation of women, including feminist movements, at 50 per cent at all levels, from start to finish. The Council should call on all the parties to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access and fully fund the humanitarian response and women's organizations. It should pursue accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including sexual violence, and expand the existing sanctions regime to include sexual violence as a criterion for designation. It should strengthen the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan to enable it to effectively support the protection of civilians and human rights, including women's rights, and to consult meaningfully with civil society. Lastly, it should condemn all attacks and threats against women human rights defenders and peace activists and remove any restrictions on their civic space and their right to continue their essential work.

The current conflict in the Sudan is a result of a failure to uphold women's rights and women's participation in shaping my country's future. I urge the international community not to repeat that mistake in other crises. We should all show solidarity with Palestinian women, who have suffered under the world's longest occupation and are now caught up in an escalating crisis in Gaza, and support their calls for an immediate ceasefire. We should support the calls of Afghan women to hold the Taliban accountable for gender apartheid. We should show the women of Ethiopia, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen and those involved in so many other conflicts around the globe that their rights are not dispensable. And we should demand that the United Nations take a principled stand by ensuring that women's rights, and women's full, equal and meaningful participation, are always a fundamental part of any peace process it supports. We should uphold the central principle of the women and peace and security agenda, which is that there can be no peace without the protection of women's rights.

The President: I thank Ms. Al-Karib for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Brazil.

I am honoured to preside over this year's annual open debate on women and peace and security. I thank the Secretary-General for his opening remarks, as well as Ms. Sima Sami Bahous for her insightful presentation. I also thank Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms. Hala Al-Karib, Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, and Ambassador Glivânia Maria de Oliveira, Representative of Brazil as Guarantor at the Peace Dialogue Table between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, for their important contributions to today's debate.

Given the current concerns regarding the Security Council's ability to act decisively on many pressing issues, it seems fitting to recall the original and unrealized transformative ambition of resolution 1325 (2000). The advocates for the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), both from Governments and civil society, knew that only women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes, as well as in the design of public defence and security policies, could ensure their effectiveness and truly transform traditional power structures. The absence of women in decision-making spaces where wars and armed conflicts are discussed is incompatible with the need to promote a culture of peace.

The 10 existing resolutions on women and peace and security provide a crucial framework for national policies that are conducive to the equitable participation of women in peace and security and that should be followed up with concrete action. Women from Latin America, Africa and developing countries in general are insufficiently accounted for in texts and events pertaining to women and peace and security. That is particularly troubling, given the fundamental contribution of women in the global South to peace and security in their respective regions. And it is also the case here at the United Nations, where generations of women, although their numbers have been insufficient, have left their mark. Today I would like to pay tribute to one of them — Bertha Lutz, a Brazilian politician and laureate scientist. As long ago as 1945, in San Francisco, she played a critical role in ensuring the inclusion of

gender equality as a prerequisite for the operations of this Organization. She firmly defended language on the equal rights of men and women in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, as well as in its Article 8. Fifty-five years before the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), Bertha Lutz and other women delegates understood that the Council needed the contribution of women if we were to avoid the horrors of a new world war. It is therefore only a matter of justice that Brazil is dedicating its presidency of this annual open debate to the memory of a great Brazilian, a true pioneer of the women and peace and security agenda.

However, the vision of Bertha Lutz and other brave women of her time has yet to be realized. Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in international peace and security is still restricted predominantly by economic, political and social structures and by multiple forms of violence and intimidation, both online and offline. The gender perspective is still insufficiently taken into account, whether in conflict prevention, relief or post-conflict recovery. Discussions on the link between gender norms and challenges to peace and security have also been very limited in the 23 years of the women and peace and security agenda.

Achieving gender equality and enhancing women's participation in peace and security requires challenging and overcoming deeply entrenched gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate women's exclusion and marginalization. We Member States, alongside international organizations and civil society, should continue to work together and harder to promote transformative cultural and social changes that support women's rights and participation. That is a task for us all, men and women, inside and outside the United Nations, to create a bold and united force for gender equality.

In that regard, we commend the signatories to the statement of shared commitments for their relentless advocacy in favour of a mainstreamed application of women and peace and security resolutions. Currently, besides Brazil, Albania, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States have adhered to those commitments. We call upon all Council members, and indeed all Member States, to follow suit and to start inviting more women briefers not only to speak on matters on the Security Council's agenda, but to every meeting convened. Such a step may seem simple and to have no immediate consequence, but it

will help to establish gender equality as a pervasive and very visible objective throughout the United Nations.

A lack of adequate and permanent funding hinders the impact of women's leadership in peacebuilding and in contexts of humanitarian crises. The implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and financing mechanisms can ensure that resources are allocated to help women build development and stability in their communities. Brazil underlines the importance of financing mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which has funded more than 1,000 civil society organizations in 43 countries.

Despite all limitations imposed on them, women have made a historic contribution to mediation efforts around the world. Drawing inspiration from Bertha Lutz, Brazil is a proud member of the Regional Network of Women Mediators of the Southern Cone, to which we recently appointed the first two experts. We have also joined the Ibero-American Network of Women Mediators — another platform to boost the meaningful participation of women in mediation and peace efforts. We look forward to joining the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks and to start offering Latin America's contribution and very rich perspective to international mediation initiatives.

In another important step, I am pleased to announce that Brazil just launched the first stage of its second national action plan on women and peace and security, which is the result of coordinated efforts among several Government agencies, Parliament and civil society. The plan covers not only foreign policy actions, but also a broad range of issues of major importance to Brazilian society, such as public security, social protection, political participation and minority rights. In that sense, it goes even beyond the scope of Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security. Given the priority afforded by the Federal Government to the empowerment of all women, the second national action plan adopts an intersectional approach and will encompass the specific needs of Black and Indigenous women, as well as women refugees and migrants, among other vulnerable groups. We will continue to work with civil society, Parliament, think tanks and academia to design specific actions and monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of our very ambitious second plan of action.

In conclusion, I underscore that enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes is not simply

a quantitative endeavour. It is not just about securing seats at negotiation tables. And it is not just symbolic representation. It is a substantive and essential task that drives the effectiveness and legitimacy of peace and security endeavours globally. It is about fundamentally reshaping dialogue and priorities and the resulting policy designs and outcomes. Women bring a wealth of innovative solutions and approaches, serving as catalysts for durable, inclusive and just peace agreements and conflict resolution strategies. Ignoring, disregarding or downplaying their contribution is neither wise nor effective. Ensuring that women — irrespective of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or social class — shape policies has a direct impact not only on their security and well-being, but also on that of society at large. It is to our collective gain.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon.

Mr. Onanga Ndiaye (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate your country, Brazil, Mr. President, for initiating this important debate concerning a matter of priority for my country, Gabon. It offers an additional opportunity, two years before the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), to reaffirm our commitment to the full participation of women in strengthening international peace and security and to promote recognition of their central role at all levels of peace processes, from conflict prevention to post-conflict recovery, including mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Bahous, for having clearly defined the challenges and prospects of our effort. I also thank Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger and Ms. Glivânia Maria de Oliveira, as well as civil society representative Ms. Hala Al-Karib, for their enlightening briefings and the important information shared.

Strengthening the participation of women in international peace and security is a requirement to achieve lasting peace in an international context marked by multiple crises of diverse natures that require concerted, united and, above all, inclusive responses from the international community. Once again, Gabon reaffirms with conviction that women must no longer systematically pay the heaviest price in contexts of armed conflict. They must be part of

the response by fully participating in all peace and decision-making processes.

The international community's appeal to recognize women as key actors in peace processes has gradually reached significant resonance. However, 23 years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), women continue to be the main victims of armed conflict situations and remain underrepresented in or marginalized from the main decision-making spheres. In many parts of the world, violence against women and violations of their rights persist, in particular in regions that are subject to instability and conflict. Despite that worrisome reality, women of all ages everywhere continue to assert themselves and to demonstrate the crucial role they can play in preventing conflict and promoting lasting peace as courageous architects of peace and development. My country remains convinced that recognizing women's central role in peacemaking contexts is a catalyst not only for empowering women but also for revitalizing socioeconomic and political environments, which in turn lays the groundwork for women's access to peaceful means for settling disputes when they do occur. That is why Gabon, together with the international community, remains firmly committed to reducing gender inequality, strengthening women's leadership and resilience and promoting women's participation in all decision-making processes.

During our presidency of the Security Council in October 2022, we convened a similar annual open debate on women and peace and security (see S/PV.9158), which highlighted the importance of strengthening women's resilience and leadership as a path to peace in regions plagued by armed groups. Moving beyond words and giving genuine insight into women's ability to assert themselves, take their destiny into their own hands and engage in shaping their own narrative remains our main objective. One of the key messages of that debate was the need for a survivor-centred approach focused on protection, resilience-building and accountability in order to better prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence. That is why we reiterate the need to heal the invisible wounds caused by war and armed conflict by providing victims with the necessary mental-health care and psychosocial support to enable us to take resolute steps towards realizing our common aspiration for a peaceful world for current and succeeding generations.

Furthermore, that debate gave us an opportunity to reaffirm the fundamental role that women play in

advancing the Silencing the Guns initiative of the African Union, including their important role in combating the illicit transfer, circulation and uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons in many regions, especially on the African continent. With regard to the tragedy of child soldiers, our message is clear: all children — boys and girls — belong in schools and not on battlefields.

Promoting gender equality and the genuine participation of women means choosing the prevention of armed conflict. Promoting the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda necessarily means strengthening our response against violence, war and the patriarchy in order to help ensure that women are not integrated into structures that generate or maintain conflict. In that regard, we call for increased national, regional and international efforts towards the comprehensive, inclusive and efficient implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions. In the same vein, we must strengthen the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in all stages of peace processes and in prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

We also call for the strengthening of partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations, in particular in combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and in coordinating of their actions on the women and peace and security agenda. The goal should be not only to find appropriate and sustainable responses to conflicts, including their root causes and negative effects, but also to further integrate the gender perspective into the mandates of United Nations peace missions, especially in post-conflict situations.

As a leading country on environmental and climate issues, Gabon also feels compelled to recall that, in the context of climate crises, women bear the heaviest brunt of the effects of climate change, including the depletion of vital resources and massive or forced displacement of people, which exacerbate tensions and conflict. And paradoxically, it is women who are the key players in adapting to, and mitigating the effects of, climate change — for instance, through nature-based solutions such as agroecology. That reinforces the need for women's participation in conflict prevention and achieving sustainable peace.

Let me be perfectly clear: ensuring the prosperity and viability of our societies and the resilience of our communities depends wholly on the extent of the role that women play today in our collective efforts to

maintain international peace and security. To that end, the Council must demonstrate much more than good intentions and translate the spirit of resolution 1325 (2000) into concrete action. That is what is needed to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of our collective action, in line with the legitimate expectations and aspirations of the peoples of the world.

The President: I now call on the Permanent Representative of the United States and Member of President Biden's Cabinet.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Brazil for convening today's open debate as we mark the twenty-third anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. I thank the Secretary-General and Ms. Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as all of today's briefers, for all they do to promote and protect the rights of women and girls.

As the first country to adopt a comprehensive law on women and peace and security, the United States remains fully committed to advancing resolution 1325 (2000). We must all do our part to live up to that resolution and the ideals we subscribe to. In that vein, later this month, the Biden Administration will launch the updated United States strategy and national action plan on women and peace and security, which will encourage partners around the world to mainstream the agenda's principles across policies and strategies.

It is well established that women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes, as leaders, negotiators and peacebuilders, increases the likelihood of a just and lasting peace. However, more financing for women and youth peacebuilders is needed, and the United States hopes to work through the Peacebuilding Commission to move forward on that.

We are also proud to join broad coalitions of previous and current Council members in signing up to the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security, and we encourage the incoming Security Council members to do the same. As a member of the group of signatories to the statement of shared commitments to advance the women and peace and security agenda, we are committed to amplifying women's voices and following up on the commendations of civil society.

This year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725) paints a gruesome picture of the risks

women and girls face, including kidnapping, torture, killing and gender-based violence in the Sudan, Ukraine, Syria and in conflicts around the world.

On 7 October, when Hamas launched its barbaric terrorist attacks against Israel, more than 1,000 people were slaughtered and innocent civilians were taken hostage and caught in the crossfire, including women, girls, babies and elderly women. It is sickening, and there is never any justification for terrorism. We also know that women and girls in Gaza, who have endured years and years of Hamas's cruelty, are in dire need of humanitarian aid and are also victims of Hamas's horrific actions on 7 October. For our part, the United States is providing \$100 million in new humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, and we continue to work around the clock to ensure that aid can reach people in need. We know that is urgent.

The bottom line is this. Right now, around the world, women and girls are under threat from conflict, repressive regimes and a growing, coordinated and highly resourced pushback on the exercise of their human rights. Those women are counting on us, on the Council and on all Member States. And as we work to advance women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in ensuring peace and security, we must place justice and accountability at the forefront of the women and peace and security agenda. The United States applauds the efforts by Member States to improve the full and meaningful participation of women in peace operations, especially in leadership positions. We also support the Secretary-General's call to increase women's participation in local efforts to respond to conflicts and to mitigate and resolve them.

The United States is also heartened to see that more troop- and police-contributing countries are meeting the United Nations gender-parity goals, including countries we partner with on capacity-building for peacekeeping, and we hope to see those trends continue. The United States stands ready to support all Member States in adopting, implementing, adapting and revising national action plans and strategies for women and peace and security. By doing so, we help women and girls, especially in conflict areas, achieve stability, economic prosperity and future growth.

Everywhere I go, I make it my mission to meet with women leaders, human rights defenders and activists. Last month I was in Chad, where I met with a group of

Sudanese women who had fled a brutal conflict where women and girls have been victims of rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence. In their eyes I saw pain and fear. It was the same pain and fear that I saw in the eyes of women whom I met in Ukraine who had endured unthinkable cruelty at the hands of Russian forces. But those women, and all women living under conflict, are also examples of strength. As just one example, in Ukraine, women have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and leadership. Ukrainian women have been first responders, front-line defenders serving in the military, heads of households and advocates for justice and accountability. We must lift up those women, and all women who are leading efforts to provide assistance to people in need, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Women and girls across the world are looking to us, and we must send a clear message that we stand with them and support them. We support them today, tomorrow and every day after that.

Ms. Al Kaabi (United Arab Emirates): I want to begin by thanking you, Sir, for presiding over today's meeting. I would also like to thank our briefers, Secretary-General Guterres, UN-Women Executive Director Bahous, President Spoljaric Egger of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ambassador de Oliveira and Ms. Al-Karib, for their valuable remarks.

Globally, the number of women and girls living in conflict-affected regions reached 614 million last year. That figure is 50 per cent higher than in 2017. Not only do women have a stake in the prevention and resolution of conflict, but they are also agents of peace whose potential for action must be leveraged. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that women's participation does not remain an afterthought or an add-on, but rather becomes the status quo. To that end, the United Arab Emirates would like to share three recommendations.

First, we must boost women's full, equal and meaningful participation at the national level. For peace efforts to be sustainable and fully representative of the interests of the community, it is critical to involve women and local community members. That not only provides important voices in and perspectives on the process, but also ensures that the process takes root within the community that it is attempting to assist. We also support the adoption of appropriate and targeted measures such as quotas for political and leadership

positions and employment and education opportunities, with the objective of improving women's position and advancing their equality. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, the gender-parity quota for the Federal National Council has gone a long way towards ensuring that women are not only benefiting from the development of our country but driving it.

Secondly, at the multinational level, including in the Security Council, regional and international institutions should be shaped by women's perspectives. Mainstreaming the women and peace and security agenda remains a key tool for ensuring that women and girl's perspectives are part and parcel of peace and security. In that regard, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security — a dedicated group of Security Council experts — has been essential to enabling a better understanding of the plight of women in conflict, as well as their contribution to preventing and resolving it. For us, as this year's co-Chair of the Group with Switzerland, we have found it to be a helpful mechanism for advancing the women and peace and security agenda across country-specific files and providing opportunities for cross-regional prioritization. But that is not all. A deeper understanding of the situation of women and girls cannot be conveyed by proxy. Hearing directly from women civil-society leaders provides key insights into efforts on the ground. That is an important and shared message that we stress today, together with our fellow signatories to the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security.

Thirdly, women's participation across the spectrum, not just within political parameters, has been proven to contribute to peace and security. In post-war scenarios, where economies are often depleted, women's economic participation is needed more than ever, not only in pursuing the improvement of the individual livelihoods of women and their autonomy and self-sufficiency, but also in leveraging their capacity to help rebuild communities. As we heard from Ms. Bahous, in Gaza today the United Nations reported the grim figure of 1,100 new female-headed households as a result of civilian casualties, with almost 4,000 children having lost their fathers. Gaza will depend on those women not only to rebuild but to be the sole bearers of responsibility and care for those who survive the bombardment. Partnerships can also provide a gateway for women to bring about positive change throughout

the conflict continuum — prevention, the provision of relief during conflict, peacebuilding and recovery.

Women will find a way to participate, as we always have. Women contributed to the very first codification of international humanitarian law at the first Hague Peace Conference in 1899, leading to the Hague Conventions. Their views and actions are present in the very DNA of the laws and customs of war and the rules that protect all civilians, women and men alike, and which we are all bound by. When the space for participation has not been made available, women and their allies have created it, sometimes through unconventional means. We have seen that in Bosnia, Liberia and Colombia. Without a doubt, in the years to come, we will refer to the women of Palestine in the same breath. Every day that women are excluded is a day that we hold ourselves back in the pursuit of our shared peace and security goals. In order to turn the tide, we urge all Member States to carry forward a sustained and ongoing commitment to women's participation in international peace and security. I would like to end by citing a woman who refused to be excluded from her society, Malala Yousafzai. She said:

“There are two powers in the world; one is the sword, and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women.”

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Secretary-General and all of our briefers today.

Twenty-three years on from resolution 1325 (2000), the United Kingdom remains resolute in our commitment to the women and peace and security agenda. Yet our collective gains are being reversed. Women's and girls' rights are under attack, and we need to take urgent and coordinated action.

In the spirit of today's theme of bringing theory to practice, I would like to highlight three areas.

First, I would like to talk about participation. We know that women's participation significantly boosts the chances of long-lasting peace. The United Kingdom's new national action plan focuses on putting women's meaningful participation into action. And I am particularly grateful to Ms. Oliveira and Ms. Al-Karib for their further briefings today because, most recently, my Foreign Secretary met with Sudanese women peacebuilders to hear their insights on enhancing women's participation. The United Kingdom was also

proud to support Colombia in developing its women and peace and security national action plan, and we applaud its extensive consultation with women and civil society.

We will continue to advocate for women to take on leading roles in resolving conflict, including in United Nations-led peace processes. As signatories to the shared commitments on women and peace and security, we are committed to amplifying women's voices and following up on the recommendations of civil society. We hear clear calls-to-action from the women who brief the Council — women from Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria and beyond — and we should turn those calls into action.

Secondly, I would like to touch upon empowerment. Women's rights organizations are vital to sustain conflict prevention and resolution efforts. As part of our International Women and Girls Strategy, we launched a \$46 million programme to support grassroots women's rights organizations around the world. Through our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, we are putting survivors at the centre of decision-making and promoting their leadership, supported by a dedicated survivor advisory group. And in Ukraine, we are providing expertise on conflict-related sexual violence and providing over \$4 million funding on gender-based violence in Ukraine and across the region.

Thirdly, I would like to say a few words about protection. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by conflict. From South Sudan to Israel and Gaza, we see the impact of conflict on women's lives. That is particularly true for women's rights defenders. The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/725) highlights that 172 women human rights defenders were subjected to reprisals because they engaged with the United Nations.

We have heard today clear and specific recommendations from the Secretary-General, from the Executive Director of UN-Women and from many others. Let us commit to moving from words to action.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Brazil for organizing this debate, as well as the speakers for their input.

To move from theory to practice in terms of women's participation in international peace and security, it is essential to talk to the women directly concerned. Many of the contexts on the Council's agenda testify

to the importance of women's contributions to conflict prevention and to the pursuit of lasting peace.

Civil society representatives bring a key perspective to the work of the Council. By subscribing to shared commitments on women and peace and security, Switzerland pledges to amplify their voice and to follow up on their recommendations. Those elements must play a major role in our deliberations and in the implementation of our decisions.

I would like to echo two women who shared their priorities in this setting during Switzerland's presidency.

First, Ms. Yasmeen Al-Eryani emphasized the need for a civic space accessible to all. In her words:

“With the overall erosion of civic space, Yemen has witnessed the unprecedented rollback of women's hard-won freedoms, including their right to participate in the labour market and play a vital role in revitalizing the economy, while ensuring their protection from exploitation and ill treatment. It also includes the freedom of women to act as political decision-makers, not just in a limited role in terms of representative participation but also in terms of their right to organize and shape civic spaces without being exposed to incitement against them; the right to a quality education and to prosper; and the right to enjoy the freedom of movement and be visibly present in all aspects of public life. Those basic rights must not be used as a tool to garner influence, and they must never be bargained away.” (*S/PV.9323, p.5*)

Secondly, the participation of women is essential to the creation of lasting peace. Switzerland is convinced of that and supports women's commitment to conflict prevention and social cohesion. Progress is also needed at multilateral level. Ms. Aïchatou Mounkaïla, President of the Network of Women-led Organizations of the Lake Chad Basin, challenged the Council, when she stated:

“I urge the Council to emphasize the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in humanitarian responses, as well as community dialogues, peacebuilding and peace negotiation processes at every level”. (*S/PV.9327, p.6*)

In addition, institutional mechanisms for women's participation need to address the specific obstacles faced by historically marginalized groups, as Nigeria

Rentería and Genith Quitiaquez pointed out last week at an event organized by Colombia and Switzerland on Colombia's first national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000).

The facts are clear — without protecting women from violence and without preventing violence against them and the violations of their human rights and international humanitarian law, women cannot fully and equally participate in political, social or economic life in times of peace or conflict.

The most flagrant violations occur every day in Afghanistan, a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, where the Taliban have institutionalized systematic gender-based discrimination and persecution.

Every State has a responsibility to prevent violations of women's and girls' rights, including in digital space. Human rights are inalienable rights to which everyone is entitled, without discrimination and regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion or language.

Nearly a quarter of a century after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding should no longer be a matter of debate. However, reality shows that we are still a long way from this goal.

“We are not here to ask, but to demand”, said Emilie Lieberherr, a Swiss activist for the women's right to vote, in 1969. That also applies to their right to participate in processes concerning international peace and security. In that sense, our deliberations and decisions must be guided by the recommendations of the women who engage with the Council and with the United Nations.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to thank Brazil for organizing this important annual open debate.

We extend our appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres for his commitment to keeping gender issues at the centre of the global agenda. Our gratitude goes to Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, UN-Women Executive Director; Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; Ms. Glivânia Maria de Oliveira, Director General of the Rio Branco Institute; and Ms. Hala Al-Karib, Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa. We thank them for their comprehensive briefings and,

more important, for their commitment to the cause of resolution 1325 (2000).

During Mozambique's presidency of the Security Council in March 2023, we underlined that the women and peace and security agenda and women's meaningful and effective participation in those processes must constitute our collective priority at the international, regional, subregional and national levels. The adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) by the Security Council represented a significant milestone by clearly highlighting the transformative role that women can play in political, economic and social processes, as well as in peace and security matters.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/725), the involvement of women in the decision-making processes on issues related to peace, security, conflict prevention and resolution, as well as the effective participation of women in peacekeeping missions, still constitutes a challenge 23 years after the adoption of that important resolution. Women continue to be disproportionately affected in all possible dimensions by armed conflicts around the world, in particular in Africa. We are therefore duty-bound to redouble our individual and collective efforts to accelerate the meaningful participation of women in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

We consider that the United Nations, through the Council, must lead by example. We must ensure the incorporation and strengthening of the gender perspective in all peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Equally important is to ensure that the parties to armed conflicts themselves take special measures to protect women, girls and children from gender-based violence.

The socioeconomic empowerment of women and girls in the post-conflict period is a fundamental tool for allowing them to contribute to the overall development of society and, through it, to sustainable peace. The onus rests on our shoulders to make sure that women's participation in the peace and security agenda is effective and meaningful.

In Mozambique, we have our own experience that is a legacy from the 10 years of our liberation struggle. That spirit still prevails. We hold the view that women are a key actor and factor in the attainment of society's goals, which include freedom, independence, peace and development. The gender parity in the Government

of Mozambique is a token of the most recent of those efforts.

No such objectives are attainable without the active and devoted participation of women. In that connection, I would like to highlight the socioeconomic opportunities that Mozambican women ex-combatants received in the country, in the context of a United Nations-supported disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, which is part of the United Nations special political mission in Mozambique.

The implementation of DDR-related tools, in particular community violence reduction projects, allows the DDR components in peace operations to mobilize and empower women to mitigate local conflicts, prevent recruitment into armed groups and build the resilience of communities, including their capacity to absorb ex-combatants. We wish to underline the importance of gender-responsive DDR through the meaningful participation of women at all stages of DDR. That is particularly essential for the success and sustainability of interventions related to the maintenance of peace and security.

As rightly indicated in the concept note (S/2023/733, annex), there is indeed a growing body of evidence that women's meaningful participation makes peace agreements more likely to succeed and to hold. Cognizant of the indispensable contribution of women to lasting peace, Mozambique has conceived and implemented several measures including, first, the appointment of female military officers to key positions; secondly, the promotion of the role of women in the fight against terrorism; thirdly, the promotion and strengthening of gender equality within the Mozambique defence forces; and fourthly, the active engagement of women in the entire process of implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). It is self-evident that more women in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding mean more effective peace missions.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Mozambique's strong commitment to the letter and spirit of resolution 1325 (2000).

Ms. Zabolotskaya (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Executive Director of UN-Women Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Ms. Spoljaric Egger, Director General of Rio Branco Institute Ms. Glivânia Maria de Oliveira

and the civil society briefer for their briefings and assessment of the current situation.

As a country with some of the most advanced legislation on the protection of women's rights, Russia supports women's participation in peacekeeping processes, including in negotiations and peacekeeping, as well as their contribution to addressing security issues and resolving armed conflicts and in post-conflict recovery. Such engagement allows for more sustainable and trust-based relations with the local population, prevents the occurrence of new cases of violations against women and children and promotes the investigation of existing cases of such violations, and helps to develop subsequent measures for the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.

The conditions for women's participation in every aspect and at every stage of peacebuilding and political processes should be tailored to take into consideration the particularities of each specific situation. Women's professional qualifications and their personal interests should also be a priority. In that context it is also essential to ensure that States work to defend the family, motherhood and traditional family values as moral underpinnings of all societies and a guarantor of the successful development of society now and in the future.

In the context of States' sustainable post-conflict recovery, ensuring women's access to resources, technology and the banking sector is an important area of cooperation. Greater attention should be paid to development issues affecting women, and to poverty reduction and women's access to education in countries with situations of armed conflict. Unilateral coercive measures are a major problem in that regard, as they have an extremely detrimental impact on the position of women and the well-being of their families, depriving them of prospects, job opportunities, education, social protection and other benefits. We call on the United Nations to actively monitor the negative effects of such measures. Those and other problems should remain the focus of the work of the Council's Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which ought to pay them more attention. It is important to avoid politicization. The decision-making procedures within the Group should meet all members' requirements for transparency and coherence.

In general, it is the implementation of the Council's key resolution 1325 (2000) and strict adherence to the

mandate it defines — the consideration of women's issues in a context of the maintenance of peace and security and in connection to situations that are on the Council's agenda — that ensures the effectiveness of its efforts. It is essential for the Council to focus on specific tasks and avoid duplicating the work of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council or the Peacebuilding Commission.

We are seriously concerned about cases where women are being killed or injured, including as a result of indiscriminate or excessive use of force. In that regard, we cannot ignore the situation in Gaza and the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation, whose victims are primarily women and children. The scale of that humanitarian disaster is expanding. Women are falling victim to acts of terrorism and indiscriminate strikes on densely populated areas. We call on the parties to the conflict to exercise restraint, de-escalate, return to dialogue and reach a political and diplomatic settlement of the long-standing conflict. For our part, we are making every effort to end the bloodshed through all possible channels, including the Security Council and the General Assembly.

It is very important to avoid politicization in our discussions, and unfortunately, some delegations are still flouting that rule. As we see it, it is vital to monitor our own armed forces' fulfilment of their obligations. Unfortunately, the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States have no interest in investigating sexual crimes against women in Afghanistan and Iraq, and yet for some reason pay greater attention to the issue when it comes to the situation in Ukraine.

In conclusion, we would like to note once again that the creation of a safe environment for women's participation in peace processes is possible only when we achieve general security for all participants in the process. Only that approach can produce a genuine, lasting and long-term peace that takes account of the interests of all the parties concerned. For our part, we reiterate our willingness to cooperate constructively with all States on the equal participation of women in resolving issues pertaining to security and the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Brazil for convening this open debate on women's participation in international peace and security, from theory to practice. We also thank the Secretary-

General for his report (S/2023/725), and we take note of the statements we heard this morning from the other briefers, whom we have listened to carefully.

Year after year, during the open debate on women and peace and security, we States discuss the importance of consolidating efforts to achieve the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in mediation and peacebuilding processes, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000) and other related resolutions. And year after year we conclude that the efforts made have been insufficient, and that an enormous number of women and girls all over the world continue to be victims of multiple and intersectional forms of violence, limited in their social, political and economic participation and imprisoned by systemic gender-based discrimination.

Against that backdrop, the theme of this annual debate takes on particular significance. How can the international community help to move the women and peace and security agenda from theory to practice? My delegation is concerned about the decline in the number of women who have participated as negotiators or delegates in active peace processes co-led by the United Nations. In 2022, women accounted for a mere 16 per cent of them, compared to 19 per cent in 2021 and 23 per cent in 2020. I also want to cite the warning in the August 2023 written assessment of the implementation of the Peacebuilding Commission's Gender Strategy action plan, which stresses that despite the increase in the number of women briefers at the Commission's meetings, the specific recommendations on the situation of women on the ground are inadequate and not nearly detailed enough. We agree with the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report, and my delegation would like to present the following points for consideration in that regard.

First, it is essential to mainstream a gender perspective into Council mandates and United Nations instruments, including those related to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, accountability and transitional justice and participation in mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes. Resolutions 2692 (2023), 2699 (2023) and 2700 (2023), on the situation in Haiti, provide good examples of a gender perspective. They contain strong wording that encourages women's political participation, and calls for the establishment of a framework for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and for increasing the number of advisers at the United Nations Integrated

Office in Haiti with dedicated expertise on issues related to gender-based violence.

Secondly, resources must be mobilized to train peacekeeping and peacebuilding forces, women and youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders, with a view to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and promoting gender-sensitive leadership.

Thirdly, we should encourage the United Nations, national institutions and civil-society organizations to cooperate in formulating national action plans on resolution 1325 (2000).

Finally, as part of the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security, this morning we made a press statement reiterating our commitment to actions aimed at giving women a voice and articulating their demands, with the ultimate goal of making progress in building just, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): The Security Council is once again convening around the all-important subject of women peace and security. With the adoption of landmark resolution 1325 (2000) in October 2000, we have continued to advocate for women's voices to be heard in peace and security discourses. We thank the Secretary-General António Guterres for his remarks and the briefers for the insightful presentations.

In March, during the presidency of Mozambique, the Council was given the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of resolution 1325 (2000), take stock of its implementation and set goals in preparation for its twenty-fifth year, in 2025 (see S/PV.9276). Today it is evident that although we have made some strides towards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, we still have many more miles to travel.

We welcome the contributions of women from the grassroots to the peace and security agenda. In the Council, we continue to hear the inspiring and enlightening briefings of courageous women, whose brave struggle for women's rights have brought significant changes to their communities, sometimes at tremendous personal costs. It is evident that women's voices and perspectives are indispensable in peace efforts and should therefore be encouraged and protected.

Ghana is a firm advocate of women's participation at all levels of national, regional and international decision-making. We believe that women's equal

participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. For that reason, the number of women in Ghana's leadership has increased considerably over time. And we remain committed to ensuring further growth in that area.

Against that background, Ghana would like to highlight the following three points regarding how we can translate the full, equal and meaningful participation of women from theory into practice.

First of all, the Security Council should reinforce its support for platforms such as the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, which rallies together United Nations Member States, regional organizations, civil society groups and the private sector to foster women's economic security and leadership. Such partnerships should be harnessed by the Council and the United Nations at large as a means of enhancing public and private sector participation in financing peace and post-conflict recovery. The private sector has the capacity to play a bigger and useful role in peacebuilding by offering logistical support, financial assistance, discounts and pro bono support to women peacebuilders as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

Secondly, the Council must create a safe environment for women involved in peace and security, including mediators, community advocates, journalists and peacekeepers to carry out their work, through digital and offline platforms. Women civil society representatives and peacebuilders who brief the Council deserve special attention. They, as well as their families, should be accorded the utmost protection by the United Nations. In that regard, we reiterate previous calls to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in coordination with other United Nations entities, to establish a framework for the protection of women who cooperate with the United Nations.

Effective bilateral cooperation, as well as collaboration across regional organizations, on the women and peace and security agenda is crucial for accelerating the economic empowerment of women in peace and security and women's empowerment initiatives. We therefore encourage such partnerships.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Ghana's commitment to ensuring the inclusion of women in our governance and peace initiatives at all levels. We will

continue to protect their rights and strengthen their voices in support of efforts to spur sustainable development.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. I also thank the briefers for their insightful analyses and recommendations.

I begin by reiterating Malta's full support to the women and peace and security agenda.

The Council's role in ensuring the participation of women in peace and security is crucial. Within the current climate, Malta is of the conviction that the Security Council can unite on the principle of protecting all civilians in Israel and Gaza. The devastating impacts that conflict has on women and girls must be central to our deliberations. Ensuring that women participate meaningfully in the leadership of political and peace processes throughout the broader region, including Libya, Iraq and Syria, is a necessary precondition for achieving sustainable peace.

Backlash against women's rights is clearly visible in the nearly 200 armed conflicts and organized violence taking place around the world. Our responses to the challenges will be crucial in ensuring women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in all aspects of peace and security.

Since taking power two years ago, the Taliban have, in both policy and practice, institutionalized the systematic persecution and discrimination of Afghan women and girls. Those are flagrant breaches of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, by which Afghanistan is bound. United Nations human rights experts warn that the escalating, grave human rights violations directed at women and girls in Afghanistan may amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity and could further be characterized as gender apartheid.

The United Nations adherence to core humanitarian and human rights principles are also being tested in Yemen, making it more challenging for women to meaningfully contribute to change in their societies. Restrictions on women's freedom of movement and expression and bans on women working for the United Nations and in non-governmental organizations violate women's basic human rights. Those restrictions require more than bureaucratic workarounds. They must also be addressed as policies that institutionalize systematic gender discrimination.

While all forms of gender-based violence are increasing, progress on women's participation in peace processes is regressing. In 2022, women's representation in United Nations-supported peace processes dropped from 23 per cent to just 16 per cent. The United Nations must not only lead by example, but it must also deliver on its commitments.

In Mali, with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the African Women Leaders Network played a crucial role in advancing the 30 per cent gender quota. We strongly urge the transitional Government to further support those advances.

Moreover, preventing conflict-related sexual violence and improving protection requires survivor-centred approaches. That is especially crucial when health services are attacked. The Sudan is an example of that where women and girls on the move are being terrorized by sexual and gender-based violence.

I wish to highlight three calls for action.

First, disarmament and arms control is at the heart of the women and peace and security agenda, yet global military spending is at its highest. By stopping the illicit transfer of weapons and ammunition, we can weaken the links between militarization and gender-based violence.

Secondly, through long-term and flexible funding to local women's rights and women-led humanitarian organizations, we can reverse the funding deficit for gender equality in crisis situations.

Thirdly, the United Nations system must ensure that the risks facing women human rights defenders are never used as an excuse to exclude them. The mandates we authorize must monitor and respond to those risks and reprisals.

As a member of the women and peace and security shared commitment holders, Malta is committed to amplifying women's voices and following up on the recommendations of civil society, including as we develop our second national action plan.

In conclusion, I wish to quote Ms. Yasmeen Al-Eryani, who briefed the Council in May, about the unprecedented rollback of Yemeni women's hard-won rights and freedoms. She stated: "[t]hose basic rights must not be used as a tool to garner influence, and they must never be bargained away." (S/PV.9323, p.5)

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Brazil for organizing this open debate, the Secretary-General for opening our meeting this morning and the speakers for their valuable insights.

As the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption in Paris of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approaches, the rights of women and girls are the subject of worrisome attacks. In response, we must implement the 10 women and peace and security resolutions adopted by the Security Council, from resolution 1325 (2000), almost 23 years ago, to resolution 2493 (2019), in all their dimensions. I would like to emphasize four points.

First, we must work for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and peacemaking. In that regard, France supports strengthening the participation and protection of women in United Nations missions and operations. To that end, our country finances the training of female officers and advisers on gender issues. We support initiatives that promote female candidates for all those positions. Furthermore, we need to involve women more in peace talks and the humanitarian response. We know that their participation significantly improves the conditions for achieving lasting peace. It is essential to introduce provisions relating to gender equality and women's rights into peace agreements.

Secondly, we must promote actions in favour of the rights of women and girls before, during and after conflict. In that regard, our country is committed to further financing feminist organizations through a dedicated fund, for which we have increased funding to the tune of €250 million over the next five years.

Thirdly, we must fight forcefully against attacks on the rights of women and girls. I would mention, for instance, Afghanistan, where they suffer massive and systematic violations of their rights. All Member States have an obligation to respect the international commitments to which they have subscribed, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Fourthly, we must combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence in times of conflict. As the Secretary-General recalls in his report (S/2023/725): over the past five years, the number of women and girls living in countries affected by conflict has increased by half. In the Sudan, as we heard earlier this morning, and in many other theatres of conflict, women and girls are

exposed to conflicts and violence, which is sometimes used as a tactic of war.

In response, we must combat the impunity of the perpetrators of these crimes and respond to the needs of the victims, first by guaranteeing them access to care and essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health services. France also reiterates its support for the International Criminal Court in its investigations into sexual violence in times of conflict. France also encourages the Council to sanction the perpetrators of this violence.

France will continue its feminist diplomacy and its work to implement the women and peace and security resolutions through its third national action plan. Our country commends the women who, within Governments and civil society and at all levels of responsibility, work to maintain peace and security. As a member of the group on shared commitments on women and peace and security, France encourages the new elected members of the Council to join this initiative.

Finally, I would like to join the call from civil society organizations for the Council to combat any attempt at intimidation or reprisals targeting women who courageously testify before this body. In 2022, those women represented almost half of the people invited under article 39 of the provisional rules of procedure. They make a contribution that is not only valuable but also essential to the work of this institution.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive presentation. Albania strongly supports his work and efforts to advance the women and peace and security agenda globally. I also thank today's briefers — Ms. Bahous, Ms. Spoljaric Egger, Ms. De Oliveira and Ms. Al-Karib — for their remarks and for helping us to better understand the current implementation stage and challenges of the women and peace and security agenda.

We have made remarkable progress in the field of women and peace and security. However, the road from theory to practice remains a bumpy one. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725) shows that women continue to be regularly excluded from peace processes, including in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, while impunity for atrocities against women and girls continues to be prevalent. Women's unique experiences as leaders and agents of change provide essential

perspectives in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Wherever women take part in a peace process, peace lasts longer. Concerted efforts are needed to bridge the gap and ensure the meaningful participation of women in international peace and security processes. To that end, I would like to emphasize three points.

First, Governments and organizations must align their practices with resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions and establish adequate institutional mechanisms to translate theory into effective implementation.

Secondly, we need transformative change to challenge societal norms and business models to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure equal access to opportunities for women at all levels.

Thirdly, at the United Nations we need to encourage and increase the number of gender-sensitive training for all United Nations peacekeeping missions components to create a friendly environment for women and mitigate the occurrence of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation acts against women in contingents. Albania strongly supports the Secretary-General's goal for a radical shift in women's participation in peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding over the next year.

We need to give civil society a voice that is heard in the Security Council. We need to work more on bringing the work of women at the grass-roots level to the women and peace and security agenda. As a member of the group on shared commitments on women and peace and security, and as a Security Council member that has walked the talk during its presidencies of the Council, Albania remains committed to amplifying women's voices and following up on the recommendations of civil society addressed to the Security Council. In that context, I would like to evoke the recommendations of Ms. Bennoune, Ms. Modi and Ms. Juan on the situation of women and girls — respectively, in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan — calling for protection from gender persecution, protection from all forms of sexual violence and the inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

Allow me to underline that the Albanian Government has put a sharp focus on policies that aim at boosting women's meaningful engagement in public life. According to the *Women in Politics: 2023*, a global map developed by UN-Women and the

Inter-Parliamentary Union, Albania ranks first in the share of women Cabinet ministers, and forty-second for the percentage of women in Parliament, representing an improvement of 12 positions in comparison to the year 2021. Albanian women's representation in politics today is above the European Union's average. Albania's ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index has also continuously and significantly improved. The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* ranked Albania seventeenth out of 146 countries.

As we move closer to the end of our mandate in the Security Council, and as this is the last annual open debate on women and peace and security for us, I want to reiterate that women and peace and security has been one of our main priorities in the Council. We have done our best to ensure that the women and peace and security agenda is fully and meaningfully integrated into all aspects of the Council's work, including by prioritizing the meaningful and safe participation of women civil society briefers in the Council. We have the privilege to serve as coordinator of the shared commitments initiative for 2023 and to work closely with other like-minded countries that believe in the transformative power of the women and peace and security agenda to enable the Security Council to fully realize its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Brazil for convening this important open debate focusing on women's participation in international peace and security. I thank in particular His Excellency Mr. Mauro Vieira, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, for presiding over this debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UN-Women and the other briefers for their comprehensive briefings.

As a signatory to the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security, Japan is committed to amplifying women's voices and following up on the recommendations of civil society presented to the Security Council. On our part, at the open debate on peacebuilding during its presidency in January this year (see S/PV.9250), Japan invited Ms. Diago Ndiaye, President of the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the Economic Community of West African States Region, to brief the Council. I am thankful for her several practical recommendations to the Council, some of which I would like to now highlight.

First, there is a call to invest in people, with a specific focus on women and girls, to ensure societal inclusivity, which will lead to the building of resilience and effective institutions.

Secondly, Governments are urged to prioritize the development of community infrastructure and the provision of basic necessities to address the needs of vulnerable populations.

Lastly, her recommendations stress the importance of addressing issues such as health emergencies, economic stability, and food security.

Those suggestions clearly underline the importance of meeting the basic needs of women and girls to tackle the root causes of their underrepresentation and exclusion in matters of peace and security. That aligns with Japan's long-standing holistic approach in international cooperation aimed at advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in various areas, including education, health, economic empowerment, human rights, leadership and norms and legislation globally. Japan is committed to those efforts.

At the national level, national action plans on women and peace and security should serve as a comprehensive tool for tracking action and implementation based on the relevant Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security, especially on participation. I am pleased by the growing number of Member States adopting such plans, most of which entail a monitoring framework, as highlighted in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725). The Security Council should continue to encourage Member States to adopt and implement a national action plan to comply with relevant Council resolutions.

Furthermore, participation constitutes the first key component of Japan's third and current national action plan, which was formulated in close consultation with civil society organizations and the broader public. I would also like to highlight that the current action plan specifically acknowledges the importance of providing support to the survivors of gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence, encompassing individuals of all genders and sexual minorities.

As I mentioned earlier, women's participation in peace and security requires a holistic approach. That applies to each Member State's nationwide efforts. Japan has promoted women's access to leadership positions in political institutions, as well as in justice, security

and defence institutions through the government-wide five-year basic plan for gender equality with numerical targets. The relevant government departments and agencies monitor the progress and take action to bridge any gaps.

At the regional level, together with Viet Nam, Japan has been co-chairing the Experts' Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus — a platform for ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners. The co-Chairs have established a women and peace and security platform under that group and, through the sharing of good practices and inviting of eminent experts, contributed to raising awareness of the women and peace and security agenda, including the importance of meaningful participation of women peacekeepers for effective operations.

Finally, I would like to share that, in September this year, Ms. Kamikawa Yoko assumed the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. She worked extensively on the promotion of the women and peace and security agenda even before she became Foreign Minister and established a parliamentary league on women and peace and security in Japan last year. Under her leadership, we will continue to make our utmost efforts to realize women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in peace processes together with all stakeholders.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of today's important meeting under the Brazilian presidency. We thank Secretary-General Guterres and the briefers for their briefings.

There are sayings in China that "women hold up half the sky" and that "women are just as competent as men". More than 20 years ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325 (2000), making it clear that women's full, equal and meaningful participation is essential to advancing peace and security. Against the current backdrop of multiple global conflicts, a review of the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) will help us to keep in mind the important mission of protecting women's rights and interests and promoting women's participation so that women can play a greater role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

I would like to share with colleagues the following four observations.

First, we must commit ourselves to preventing and resolving conflicts in a comprehensive manner. The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725) notes that the deterioration of the global security situation is a major impediment to the realization of gender equality. In the Middle East, renewed fighting has led to the deaths of more than 7,000 people, most of whom are women and children. In Africa and Latin America, terrorism, armed conflict and gun violence have victimized women and children in particular. We call on the international community to show a greater sense of urgency, expeditiously promote the political settlement of relevant hotspot conflict issues, ensure that women are protected from violence, enhance their sense of security, and create a peaceful and tranquil environment for their development. In that connection, the Security Council in particular should perform its duty to take responsible and meaningful collective action to address the current crisis in Palestine and Israel, and promote a cessation of hostilities so as to create conditions for the effective protection of civilians, including women.

Secondly, we must commit ourselves to putting gender equality into practice. Secretary-General Guterres once said that women leaders are essential to peace and progress for all. We sincerely salute the women who have stepped forward in conflict areas. We fully acknowledge their active participation in mediation efforts and situations in which their personal safety is jeopardized. In recent years, the Secretariat has launched a number of positive initiatives to increase the percentage of women senior officials and heads of mission, which China commends.

We call on the international community to further incorporate the gender perspective into all stages of peace processes, give full play to the unique advantages women bring to the table and remove unnecessary obstacles to women's equal participation in mediation and negotiation efforts, thereby granting them greater decision-making power.

Thirdly, we must work to realize women's economic empowerment and development. That is not only a sure way to achieve gender equality, but also an inherent requirement for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In Rwanda, Juncao technology from China has helped many women farmers become entrepreneurs. In Solomon Islands, the provision of fishing boats and the construction of farmers markets — both part of Chinese aid programmes — has given local women new

opportunities to generate income and create wealth. In Nepal, rural women have not only received poverty alleviation loans from China, but have also diversified their income revenues and improved their social status with their skills. Those examples fully illustrate that development is the master key to resolving all problems and the fundamental way to improve the status of women. The Council and the international community should put into practice the concept of development for peace, promote the empowerment of women on the basis of development and create better conditions for women to enhance their own capabilities.

Fourthly, we must commit ourselves to strengthening global cooperation and partnership. As the saying goes, many hands make light work. Delivering on the commitments of the women and peace and security agenda at a faster pace cannot be achieved without strong input from the entire United Nations system and all the international and regional partners. We hope that organizations such as UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme will further enrich and improve the toolbox and road map for women's development in order to effectively address the challenges women face, including poverty, discrimination, violence and the gender-based digital divide. We call on the international community to actively help to rebuild conflict areas and increase investment in health care, education and training with a view to improving the situation of women. We call for strengthening North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and promoting greater flows of capital, human resources and technology to developing countries in order to narrow the gap in women's development among countries.

China has always been an advocate for gender equality, a supporter of the women and peace and security agenda, and a contributor to the cause of women's development internationally. We have sent more than 1,000 female peacekeepers to the United Nations, cooperated with UNESCO to establish the UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education, funded health care and education for women and girls in developing countries and incorporated exchanges and cooperation on women's issues into the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, among other multilateral cooperation mechanisms. This week, the thirteenth National Women's Congress opened in Beijing, with more than 1,800 delegates from all over China gathering

in the capital to discuss the development of women's affairs in the new era. China is ready to strengthen partnerships with various parties, through its own development and through international cooperation, to make further progress and achievements in the global women's cause.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I now give the floor to the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa.

Mrs. Pandor (South Africa): South Africa would like to thank the Federative Republic of Brazil for convening this open debate to discuss how we can effectively move from theory to practice to enhance women's participation in international peace and security. We appreciate the informative presentations by all the briefers this morning.

South Africa believes that as we prepare for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), enhanced international efforts are needed to focus on implementing the commitments made to advancing women's participation in all peace processes. We made the same call in 2019, when the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2493 (2019), as proposed by South Africa (see S/PV.8649). It is therefore disheartening to note that the percentage of women in peace negotiations today stands at a measly 19 per cent in United Nations-led processes, down from 23 per cent in 2020. It is our belief that peace agreements are more sustainable when women are at the table.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725) points to several concrete actions that we Member States can take to reverse that trend, and South Africa is largely in agreement with the proposals. We also note that the current global security environment may contribute to the reversal of progress in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. We therefore re-emphasize our call for urgent action to secure peace in the Israel-Gaza war, in conflicts on the African continent and in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In that context, it is alarming that the number of women and girls living in conflict-affected settings has increased by 50 per cent in 2022 compared to 2017, owing to the increasing number of armed conflicts since then.

In South Africa we have tried to do our part. We initiated the Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum in 2015 and the women mediators network to train cohorts of African women negotiators and peace monitors. The training has made an immense contribution to drawing women in communities together and is setting targets for women's direct participation in peace delegations and negotiating teams. That initiative has shown how empowered women can contribute to peace and stability and support other women living in vulnerable conditions. South Africa also contributes to training and capacity-building for women in peace processes at the continental and local levels. We provide annual youth and women's training programmes on conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation to women from conflict-affected countries. Some of the trainees are now members of peacebuilding initiatives in their various countries. We truly appreciate the partnerships we have established with the African Women Leaders Network and FemWise-Africa — the African Union's platform for women mediators — and with the Government of Norway.

In the same vein, we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General, as articulated in the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative and the uniformed gender parity strategy, which continue to positively advance the women and peace and security agenda. We are pleased to note the contribution of South African female peacekeepers making a difference on the ground when deployed to missions. Those include dedicated individuals such as Major Felicia Thobeka Mswane, who previously served as the Fire Support Coordinator for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Force Intervention Brigade; Lieutenant Colonel Martha Masango, Chief of the Intelligence Cell of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade; Major Seitebatso Pearl Block, the MONUSCO Information Operations Officer who was awarded the United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award in 2017; and Lieutenant Colonel Fulufheto Kouter, the Contingent Commander of the South African Police Service in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, who was recently recognized for the sterling leadership she provides to her fellow colleagues.

In conclusion, in the light of our discussions yesterday on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine (see S/PV.9451), I would like to recognize the fundamental role played by civil society

organizations in the search for sustainable peace. In that regard, let me highlight the cross-community solidarity forged by Women of the Sun, of Palestine, and Women Wage Peace, of Israel, aimed at urging the parties to engage in dialogue and diplomacy to reach a just, comprehensive and sustainable peace. Those partnerships are an example of positive activism and inspirational leadership by women striving to find a solution in the context of the continued occupation of Palestine. We encourage those women to continue with their solidarity amid adversity and the deepening political and security crisis.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg thanks the Brazilian presidency for convening this open debate and fully aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security and the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group.

As we approach the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), we must acknowledge that much remains to be done. Women and girls continue to face several challenges to their participation in decision-making processes. They are still all too often excluded from conflict prevention and resolution efforts. It is time for action so that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes can go from theory to practice, at every level and at all stages of peace and security decision-making processes.

Let us then really ask ourselves what more we can do and how we can act differently so that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls can be made possible. Above all, let us provide effective answers to these questions.

Luxembourg's support for strengthening the role of women as agents of peace is part of our feminist foreign policy and our national action plan on women and peace and security, which was launched in 2018 and is currently being extended. To allow for the participation of women in all their diversity in achieving the goals of the women and peace and security agenda and to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination, we must take into account two key factors.

The first is achieving gender equality. The lack of progress in the promotion of gender equality is closely linked to a lack of understanding of the essential role

that gender equality plays in improving global peace and security. To remedy gender inequality, we must adopt a global approach and take concerted action within all multilateral bodies, including, of course, the United Nations. If wars are waged by men, let us make women the drivers of peace. But, make no mistake, any work towards gender equality is incomplete without the participation of men and boys in the feminist agenda.

The second is protecting sexual and reproductive health rights. Allowing women and young girls to make autonomous decisions about their own bodies is an essential step in achieving gender equality and in allowing women and girls to participate in peace processes. The provision of information and education on sexual and reproductive health rights and the accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services create more just, more resilient and more durable societies in which all women can make decisions about their future.

As a new crisis in the Middle East undermines global peace and security, the need to make progress on the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda remains more crucial than ever before.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia.

Mrs. Marsudi (Indonesia): What happened in Gaza over the last week reflects today's reality. More than 60 per cent of the fatalities of the attack on civilians are women and children. I must be honest: despite global efforts for empowerment and calls for equality, the reality for women is still far from ideal. Women in many corners of the world are the first victims in the absence of peace and the spread of insecurity. This should be a painful wake-up call for the global community and spur it to invest more in the women and peace and security agenda. Women make up half of the world's population. Therefore, women must be seen as an integral part of the solution and as effective agents of peace.

Today I wish to underline three points.

First, we must reignite the fundamental understanding of women's participation. Empowering

and engaging women must not be seen as a burden, but rather an investment — a global standard towards which everyone should strive. Meaningful empowerment and the participation of women in economic, social and political spheres strengthen society's resilience, contributing to greater peace. I have seen this with my own eyes — the positive contribution of women peacekeepers on the ground.

Secondly, we must invest in women's leadership in peace processes. Data shows that women's participation increases the probability of peace agreements. However, women remain underrepresented in peace processes and are often not equipped for the roles they take in conflict scenarios. Therefore, we must invest more in the role of women, including within the United Nations system, to ensure a safe and conducive environment for women to succeed and thrive in global peace processes.

Thirdly, we must promote education for women. Education remains the key to breaking barriers and increasing women's participation in society. However, in Afghanistan, more than 80 per cent of school-age women and girls are not attending school. This is deeply concerning. Inclusive education is the bedrock of a better future for Afghanistan. Indonesia therefore works very hard to promote access to education for Afghan women and girls. Indonesia remains committed to providing scholarships and training for Afghan women and continues to build a conducive environment and inclusive society for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The path towards global peace and security can be charted only through women's full participation. Indonesia will remain at the forefront of charting this path towards a better future for us and a better future for women, together.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting and resume following the adjournment of the 9453rd meeting, to be held this afternoon.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.