



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

Provisional

8949

th meeting

Tuesday, 18 January 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Ms. Huitfeldt/Ms. Heimerback (Norway)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Xhaçka
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Botchwey
India	Mr. Tirumurti
Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Ms. Zeya

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Protecting participation: addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes

Letter dated 10 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/22)

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of Security Council members dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this official record of the Security Council will be supplemented by a compilation of annexes (S/2022/38) containing the statements submitted by interested non-members of the Council.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Women and peace and security

Protecting participation: addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes

Letter dated 10 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/22)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Fiji, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Morocco, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Turkey 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. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Zarqa Yaftali, Executive Director of the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation; and Ms. Kaavya Asoka, Executive Director of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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/2022/22, which contains the text of a letter dated 10 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working

methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I wish to warmly welcome the ministers and other high-level representatives. Their presence here today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bachelet.

Ms. Bachelet: The Security Council has played a vital role in the drive to ensure that peace is built by and for women. Yet between 1992 and 2019, only 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes worldwide were women. And that was before the pandemic struck and before a wave of intensifying conflicts, undemocratic political transitions and disastrous humanitarian crises took hold in many societies, further reducing women's rights.

The situation that now faces women human rights defenders and prospects for women's full — not tokenistic — participation in shaping and building peace are vastly worse.

That harms all of us. Women's safe and meaningful participation is necessary to ensure a fuller range of action to bind society together and address not only the root causes of conflict but also its full impact, including gender-based violence and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Implementing resolution 1325 (2000) requires consistent policies for public recognition, effective protection and vastly increased strategic, flexible, sustainable and targeted financing for women's civil-society organizations, including women human rights defenders, and it requires action to end the violence that so frequently targets women and girls who seek to lead movements for change.

In reality, barely 1 per cent of funding in fragile or conflict-affected countries goes to women's rights organizations. The enabling environment that lies at the heart of the women, peace and security agenda is also largely absent.

In 2020, my Office verified 35 killings of women human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists in seven conflict-affected countries where data could be retrieved. That number, which is certainly an undercount, surpassed the confirmed numbers of killings in 2018 and 2019.

We have also documented patterns of attacks against women working on gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, corruption, labour rights and environmental and land issues. In every region, we have seen women subjected to arrests and detention; intimidation; sexual violence; and harassment via smear campaigns. Intimidation and reprisals by State and non-State actors against people who cooperate with the United Nations also remain high, including in countries on the Council's agenda. Those human rights violations significantly undermine global efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace because they deter women from participation and leadership.

In Afghanistan, the *de facto* Cabinet and other key forums, at the national and provincial levels, exclude women. That heavily undermines their capacity to ensure a durably peaceful future in which all have an equal stake. Facing a humanitarian disaster of unprecedented proportions, the country needs all its people to come together. Instead, denial of the fundamental rights of women and girls is massively damaging the economy and the country as a whole.

In recent months, many Afghan women human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and judges have been forced to flee or to go into hiding — often after repeated threats. Many have lost all sources of income. Afghan women have been excluded from decision-making that affects their lives and families and prevented from fully exercising their right to participate in all spheres of civic and public life.

I urge the Security Council to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in Afghanistan — including against women and girls — are held to account in order to enable conditions for sustainable peace. I ask all States to use their influence with the Taliban to encourage respect for fundamental human rights.

I further call on States to create safe pathways and resettlement programmes for Afghan women human rights defenders and to immediately halt the deportation of Afghan women who seek protection.

It is also vital to maintain a strong human rights presence and focus for all United Nations engagement in Afghanistan, with strong advocacy and tangible support for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, and for women's human rights.

In the Sahel region, critical deficits in women's empowerment are clearly a factor in the complex development, security and humanitarian crisis. Several countries in the region are at the very bottom of the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index. Extremely violent armed-group attacks also increase the threat of abductions, violence, exploitation and abuse of women and girls, as well as local closures of schools, particularly for girls.

I was therefore encouraged, during my recent mission to the region, to hear senior members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Joint Force emphasizing the importance of the increased integration of women into political, security and development policies to address the crisis. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) will continue to support implementation of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force Compliance Framework to address those issues, including obstacles to women's direct participation in the security forces. Ensuring women's presence in the armed forces will be helpful on many levels, including that of fostering public trust.

In Myanmar, women human rights defenders have long been a force for peace and inclusivity, including at the forefront of resistance against military rule. But many women's civil-society groups have been forced to shut down amid the violence that has gripped the country since February last year. Women medical workers, media workers, protesters, participants in civil disobedience, activists on social media and those providing food and shelter to people in need have been targeted for assault and arbitrary detention. Women and girls appear to number more than 2,100 of the estimated 10,533 people detained by the State Administration Council and its affiliated armed elements between February and November last year.

In contrast, Colombia's 2016 Final Peace Agreement was a global landmark in terms of women's participation and the inclusion of gender-specific measures. The Truth Commission and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace have also promoted women's participation, and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as

Missing has recognized women's essential role in the search for missing people.

Nonetheless, the implementation of gender-specific measures on issues such as land reform, political participation and security guarantees — including for women human rights defenders — and other points of the agreement should be strengthened. I also recommend greater efforts in Colombia to combat continued conflict-related sexual violence and to guarantee that the victims of such crimes are treated with dignity and have access to adequate protection, justice and reparation. That work will serve the cause of justice and, therefore, peace.

At the heart of resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions of the Council is the need for strategies that create inclusive and safe participation channels for women from all backgrounds, movements and communities. Protection of their work, lives and rights is central to that effort.

The international community must stand united and push back against attempts to attack, silence and criminalize women and their right to defend rights, participate in decision-making and express dissenting opinions. We also need to do more and better to provide safe spaces for women human rights defenders to interact with the Council and its subsidiary bodies, without fear of retribution.

I am encouraged to see some States working to mitigate reprisals against women peacebuilders who engage with the Council, including tailored contingency plans in coordination with United Nations peace operations on the ground. I also applaud States that provide support to women briefers who face retribution as a result of their cooperation with the Council, including technical, financial and advocacy assistance.

It would be valuable for the Security Council to consider harmonizing approaches to ensure the safe involvement of women in peace processes, as well as their participation in the Council's work. Going forward, peace operation mandates could explicitly include provisions for the protection of all civil-society actors and United Nations interlocutors from threats and reprisals, particularly women peacebuilders, as is already the case for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

Strengthening the timely and disaggregated collection of data on women's participation and

protection in peace processes is also essential to a more effective monitoring of results.

In recent years, OHCHR has been strengthening the gender perspective of United Nations investigative bodies, providing training and guidance and deploying dedicated gender and gender-based violence experts. For example, the October 2021 report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya documents the disproportionate effect of the conflict — and the proliferation of militias — on women, including the emblematic killings of a woman political leader and a woman journalist. It also highlights the repeated attempts to silence prominent women through violence, including through online incitement to violence, and the resulting chilling impact on women's engagement in civic space. Those investigative efforts — including through the deployment of dedicated capacities — require more consistent and more effective financial resources.

Decisions on peace that do not reflect women's voices, realities and rights are not sustainable. There must be clear advocacy for and significant investment in women human rights defenders and peacebuilders: removing obstacles such as the digital divide; expanding financial support; and significantly increasing accountability for attacks and intimidation. The work of addressing discrimination, inequality, denials of women's civic space and gender-based violence should also be viewed as a priority for building peace.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Yaftali.

Ms. Yaftali: I would like to thank Norway for the opportunity to address the Security Council today at this critical moment for women in Afghanistan. I am happy to be here once again, a year after I previously addressed the Council (see S/2020/1084), although I am sad and disappointed to share the pain, inhumanity and violence that the women and the people of Afghanistan are facing today.

One year ago, we thought that the peace talks with the Taliban were being monitored by the world and that, with the close collaboration with the United States, the talks would lead to the formation of an inclusive Government in which women and all other groups would be able to participate meaningfully and that the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people, including women, would be protected.

One year ago, on the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), I addressed the Council with pride as I shared the achievements of Afghanistan's women over the past two decades. I told Council members about the hundreds of thousands of educated women who were Ministers, diplomats, judges, attorneys, defence lawyer, athletes, artists, writers, journalists, professors, business women, pilots and activists. I told them how far we had come since the Taliban had last been in power. I told them that Afghanistan society was ready to see women lead the country into the future.

However, I shared my fears then as well. I asked the international community to protect our hard-won gains involving women's participation, which were the result of international support and the product of the innumerable, untold sacrifices of Afghanistan's women over 20 years. I told members that peace cannot come at the cost of women's rights and that we needed the international community to uphold its responsibility to safeguard our gains. I told them that I and my sisters in other countries on the Security Council's agenda would view their policies on Afghanistan as the true test of their commitment to upholding resolution 1325 (2000).

The world did not listen. For me, the rhetoric of the women and peace and security agenda collapsed on 15 August 2021. Today I am addressing the Council as a refugee. Like so many other people of Afghanistan, I lost my country overnight. We went from being a democracy to a country under the control of an extremist and totalitarian regime that the Security Council itself has designated as a terrorist group.

Today women and girls are demonstrating in Kabul and other regions and cities of Afghanistan to regain the right to work and education in the country. They are facing violence and serious threats from the Taliban for doing so. Some women protesters have been imprisoned or have disappeared. We do not know if they are dead or alive. Thousands of women who worked with military and security forces in Afghanistan now live in fear for their lives.

Seven hundred media outlets have been closed, and freedom of speech has been severely limited. Journalists who cover those events and protests and broadcast the truth are being arrested and taken away to unknown places and, in some cases, killed. The oppression of women and civilians by the Taliban is increasing daily. There is no legal system. The mainstream media in the West has lost interest in our situation and moved on

to the next news of the day. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's women wonder what has become of years and years of promises.

We are here today to discuss how to protect women's participation and the threats that women human rights defenders and peacebuilders are facing in all conflicts. Afghanistan is an example of what can happen when the international community fails to live up to its promises. I therefore urge the Council to consider my recommendations.

It is time that the Security Council break its silence on the future of the 30 million citizens of Afghanistan, of which more than 15 million are women, by stating its clear expectations of the Taliban with regard to the protection of women's rights, including the right of women's human rights defenders to operate freely without fear of reprisal, the right to education for all women and girls and the right of all women to work and political participation, without restriction throughout the country. Any step to recognize the Taliban currently is an endorsement of the oppression of the women of Afghanistan.

The role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is more important than ever. I urge Council members, as they consider renewing its mandate in March, to ensure that UNAMA continues to monitor the human rights situation, protect and promote human rights and ensure that the people of Afghanistan are supported in community-led efforts to facilitate and coordinate humanitarian assistance, resolve conflict and build peace.

There is also a need to ensure support for education as part of humanitarian efforts and to ensure that education also falls under the new UNAMA mandate. In addition, there is an urgent need to appoint a United Nations special rapporteur for Afghanistan so that she can start her work soon, but it is important that she be familiar with the context of Afghanistan and able to maintain the principle of neutrality.

The Council must call for an inclusive, negotiated peace process that enjoys the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse women from across the country at all stages of planning, negotiation and implementation.

I conclude my statement with the words of the women who are protesting every day in the streets of Afghanistan.

“There is no peace, and there is no participation or protection for women in Afghanistan. But there is violence against women every day there. We are here. Please listen to us. We want the right to education, work and political participation and the right to be alive. Please break your silence.”

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Asoka.

Ms. Asoka: I thank members of the Security Council for the opportunity to brief them today. I am Kaavya Asoka, and I represent the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, a civil society coalition of 18 international non-governmental organizations that, for more than 20 years, have worked to promote women’s rights and their full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security.

In preparation for today’s meeting, we spoke last week with our civil society colleagues from Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, South Sudan, the Sudan, Syria and Yemen — women who deliver critical services to their communities, who broker ceasefires and participate in peace processes and who have dedicated their lives to the relentless pursuit of peace, justice and human rights. Many of them have addressed Council members in this Chamber, and many have paid the price for doing so. It is their voices that members are hearing today, and they are asking them for help.

There would be no women and peace and security agenda without civil society, particularly the women who are living and working through the daily realities of war. Their views and active participation are central to achieving our collective goal of peace and security, but that participation comes at a cost that we should not be asking anyone to pay.

We observed in our open letter to the Security Council of October 2021 that to be a woman or a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI+) person in many parts of the world, particularly in conflict, means having to choose between fighting for your rights or fighting for your life. That should not be the case anywhere. It should not be the case in Afghanistan, where women leaders and activists have worked for peace and equal rights for decades and currently live in fear of being targeted by the Taliban, even as they continue to bravely demonstrate in the streets.

It should not be the case in Myanmar, where women and LGBTQI+ activists who led protests against the coup d’état are being targeted by the military. They are detained, tortured and sexually abused for standing up for human rights and democracy. It should not be the case in any of the other situations on the Security Council’s agenda.

It should not be the case here in the Security Council. Reprisals against individuals who brief in this very Chamber are a symptom of global trends — the closing of civic space, the erosion of human rights norms and the increasingly misogynistic and militarized environments in which they live and work today.

Our coalition has worked to ensure that conflict-affected communities are heard by policymakers. We welcomed the adoption of resolution 2242 (2015), which enabled more women in civil society to share their expertise directly with the Council. Yet, as the number of briefers has increased, so have the repercussions for speaking up. That is a perfect illustration of the threats facing all women who seek to engage actively in peace and political processes — the topic of today’s debate. The more women assert their rights, the greater the backlash.

The women leaders with whom we work have faced intimidation, threats and reprisals directly related to their engagement with the Council. They have been censored, threatened and harmed. They have been told to be silent on issues integral to our work, such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights, because those were considered incompatible with so-called cultural or religious values. Their laptops have been confiscated, and their phones and bank accounts hacked. They have been arbitrarily detained by security forces following their briefings. They have been accused of being spies for foreign Governments. They have been subjected to smear campaigns and defamation. They have faced intimidation right before sitting in this chair.

We have had to relocate multiple women after they briefed the Security Council, some of whom have yet to return to their homes. In one recent case, an individual was abducted the day after a Security Council briefing. We feared that they had been tortured or were dead. For months, we dropped all of our other work to focus on that case until they were released. We asked several Member States and United Nations agencies for help but received little. It taught us a difficult lesson — nobody,

other than our own civil society colleagues, was willing to help an individual who had faced reprisal for having cooperated with the United Nations system. That is unacceptable.

Our experience reflects a pattern. The number and severity of reprisals and intimidation against anyone engaging with the United Nations has exponentially increased in recent years. Approximately a third of the women we have supported in briefing the Security Council since 2018 have faced intimidation or reprisals, and approximately 67 per cent of those cases were perpetrated by State actors. That is just the tip of the iceberg. The United Nations has publicly documented only a fraction of such cases directly associated with the Security Council. Many have not been reported at all, out of fear of further reprisals or a complete lack of confidence that anything would happen as a result of the reporting. The gap in information means that policy responses fail to take into account the basic facts on the ground that could well determine whether or not a woman lives or dies.

Let us be clear — reprisals are designed to silence women human rights defenders and stop them from doing their work. Those risks are compounded for marginalized groups, such as LGBTQI+ activists and women with disabilities, and they affect not only individuals, but families, communities and civic space. Such repressive measures not only harm those who choose to speak out anyway but will also deter other advocates from doing their important work unless the Council puts a stop to it now.

Last week we talked about what those women need to continue their work in the face of those challenges. They told us that they need funding to support urgent needs, such as personal security, relocation, increased security for their homes and offices and the payment of legal fees. They also need responsive institutions that they can contact directly in their hour of need. We discussed the challenges of their activism, the toll their work has taken on them and, most of all, their waning faith in the international community's willingness to act on their concerns. Their clear message to the Council is that, while such protection measures can keep them safe temporarily, only genuine political support for their work can ensure their long-term security.

If Council members are truly committed to ending attacks against women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, it is critical to address the root causes

of conflict and gender inequality, not only their consequences. The Security Council has already called on Member States to enact measures to protect women civil society and to create an enabling environment for all those who defend human rights and advocate for peace. Yet in this very Chamber, members have failed to consider the price paid by the civil society briefers they invite.

Silence is complicity. The Council cannot afford inaction if it is to fulfil its obligations under the women and peace and security agenda. We therefore call on all Member States, the leadership of the United Nations and Security Council members to stop the intimidation, attacks and reprisals against all human rights defenders, end impunity and ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable when such acts occur.

The Council's political support can keep an at-risk human rights defender alive. It is therefore important to publicly support the work of human rights defenders, swiftly condemn all attacks against them, including in the Security Council, and use diplomatic channels to raise these issues with States that have committed reprisals.

The Council must call on Secretary-General Guterres to ensure that all United Nations staff, especially the leadership of the United Nations, publicly champion the role of women human rights defenders and make sure that the United Nations provides all the necessary protection to those at risk and their families. That means providing rapid, flexible and targeted resources for women at risk and directly funding their organizations. It means establishing clear protocols for how the United Nations should respond to individual cases. It also means ensuring that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has the capacity to proactively carry out its work on reprisals so that the burden shifts from individuals who face attacks to the system with the capacity to protect them. All those protection measures must be developed in partnership with individuals at risk, whose views and needs must be at the heart of any response. All peace operations must be fully resourced and empowered to provide practical support to all defenders at risk.

Lastly, we need a safe and enabling environment for civil society members. We must decriminalize their lives and work and enact legislation that protects their rights, in line with international human rights law.

I would like to underline one final point. The risks women face should in no way be used as an excuse to exclude them. To do so would be to let those who wish to silence them win. Instead, Member States and the United Nations must prioritize and actively support the participation and leadership of women in all aspects of peace and security.

Today the Council has a choice. The members of the Security Council can show us, and indeed the international community, exactly where they stand. They can choose to support us by taking action, or they can continue to put our lives at risk by doing nothing. We urge them to challenge those who believe it is not a woman's place to question authority, speak out against abuse or defy power and patriarchy by responding that a woman's place is exactly where she decides it should be — whether fighting for human rights, participating in a peace process, protesting on the streets or sitting in the Chamber with Council members.

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

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana.

Ms. Botchwey (Ghana): I have the greatest pleasure to convey Ghana's appreciation to the delegation of Norway for convening today's all-important meeting. We are equally grateful to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet, and Zarqa Yaftali and Kaavya Asoka, the two civil society briefers, for their insightful briefings. The briefings have laid bare the contemporary threats faced by women peacebuilders, the factors that impede their full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes and the means by which the Security Council can rightly address violence targeted at them. It should always be our collective drive to ensure that women take their rightful place in national, regional and global peacebuilding efforts, in an atmosphere that is devoid of fear and panic. It is Ghana's sincere hope that our debate today, as the first open debate for the year 2022, will create the much-needed momentum for the rest of the year and beyond when it comes to protecting women in peace and security.

Let me also commend the Secretary-General for his comprehensive 2021 annual report on women and peace and security (S/2021/827). The report highlights certain alarming realities endured by women in peace processes, which require the most urgent attention of the Security Council. Ghana notes with great concern

the atrocities being committed against women who lend their time, energy and expertise to peace processes, with the objectives of safeguarding international peace and security and making our world a better place.

It is therefore disheartening to observe the continued and progressive increase in intimidation, threats and reprisals against these women who are drivers of the positive change we all desire. In many cases, threats targeted at women peacebuilders are translated into unspeakable violence, costing many of them their lives. The Secretary-General's 2021 annual report indicates that, in 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights verified 35 cases of killings of women involved in peace and security, including human rights activists, journalists and trade unionists, in seven conflict-affected countries. Women academics, Supreme Court judges, youth advocates and civil society activists have been victims of severe retaliatory violence. These facts point to the pressing need for the United Nations and its States Members to create a safe environment to enable women to carry out their work independently, and without undue interference, in accordance with the tenets of resolutions 1325 (2000), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019).

Permit me to share with the Council a number of initiatives being implemented by Ghana under the women and peace and security agenda and the protection of women in peace processes. Let me begin by indicating that Ghana's formal structures aimed at augmenting the diverse roles of women in peace and security is derived, *inter alia*, from resolution 1325 (2000). Ghana's Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is the government agency responsible for coordinating the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and other Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security.

In 2012, the Ministry of Gender developed Ghana's first national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), for the period 2012-2014. Several activities were carried out under the action plan, including sensitization programmes and workshops for security agencies, traditional authorities and civil society organizations, among other institutions, which increased, to a large extent, awareness of the crucial role of women in peace and security across Ghana.

Upon the expiration of the first national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000) and based on the gaps identified in its implementation, the second edition

of the action plan was launched in March 2020 and is expected to be operational until 2025. Efforts by diverse stakeholders to support the implementation of the second action plan include training gender activists in peace and security issues, training women as mediators and sensitizing women at the grass-roots level on their roles in ensuring peaceful societies.

The Ghana Armed Forces, as well as other security agencies, are also currently reviewing their regulations with the objective of rolling out policies that are women-friendly and that ensure that women who participate in peace and security, including peacekeeping, are adequately protected. The Ministry of Gender is being supported by other stakeholders, including the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and the West African Network for Peacebuilding, to enable the operationalization of the women and peace and security agenda in Ghana.

Ghana is the ninth largest contributor of personnel to United Nations missions, and, as of April 2020, Ghanaian women constituted 14 per cent of military and 25.6 per cent of police personnel deployed to United Nations and African Union missions. The increasing representation of Ghanaian women in peacekeeping operations has increased Ghana's protective abilities through national legislation. We believe that the United Nations will be able to make significant gains in the protection of women peacebuilders if Member States incorporate the global women and peace and security agenda and relevant Council resolutions into national action plans and programmes and implement them.

Ghana also wishes to make the following four points on how States Members of the United Nations can ensure the protection of women in peace processes and how the Security Council can prevent and respond to intimidation, violence and attacks against women. First of all, the Council should urge the Secretary-General to ensure the allocation of targeted, practical and rapid resources to facilitate responses to threats against women peacebuilders or avert potential dangers when they occur. In this regard, the Council should ensure that peace operations are adequately resourced to address the challenges encountered by United Nations entities and Member States in monitoring, reporting and providing support to women peacebuilders.

Secondly, the Council should urge the Secretary-General to use his good offices to build the capacity of United Nations staff in conflict zones, with the objective

of increasing their understanding of the work of women in peace processes. This will ultimately empower United Nations workers in conflict environments to furnish victims or potential victims of reprisals with the needed protection and support. In addition, United Nations sanctions committees should be utilized as tools to bring to justice those guilty of intimidation, threats and reprisals against women in peacebuilding and to serve as possible deterrents to potential aggressors. The active participation of women on panels of experts is therefore highly encouraged.

Lastly, the Security Council, Members States and the United Nations at large must be unequivocal and consistent in their defence of women briefers, and they must continue to condemn all attacks against them. That level of international support will send a strong message to perpetrators of violent reprisals against women briefers, making them fully aware that the world is watching and that any violence against these women will not be tolerated.

In conclusion, women are usually the group most adversely affected by conflict but the most marginalized in peace processes and the most punished for their peacebuilding efforts. Women's voices bring real gender perspectives to peace discourses, which lead to better policies and more equitable, gender-sensitive and sustainable peace deals. Therefore, ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding should not be reduced to mere rhetoric within the confines of the Security Council. We owe it to women in peace and security all over the world to convert the rhetoric into zealous and concrete action.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania.

Ms. Xhaçka (Albania): It is a great honour for me to be the first Albanian Foreign Minister to address the Security Council as a non-permanent member of this esteemed body, but what makes this occasion really special for me and for my country is the issue that we are addressing today — women and peace and security — which is an issue that is the top priority of Albania's agenda for the coming two years. I want to thank my Norwegian colleague and the Norwegian presidency for this opportunity. I also want to thank High Commissioner Bachelet for her remarks. We commend her personal commitment to the cause. I am also very grateful to the briefers, whose perspectives

from the field were particularly informative and insightful, yet heartbreaking and a cry for action.

I have worked on this agenda for a while now as a politician, but also as a human rights activist. During all those years, one thought has been with me constantly — how is it possible that women still have to fight for something as basic as equality, for the same rights as the other half of the population, men?

It is perplexing, in fact, that even in our day and age, equal rights, representation, education and opportunity cannot be taken for granted if one is a woman. Or, more to the point of this debate, it is perplexing that the right to participate in building and maintaining peace and security cannot be taken for granted if one is a woman.

It is a sad truth of history, but it is a sad truth of our day and age too that, while men do most of the actual fighting, women often bear the brunt of it. I say that not as some cliché-like slogan, but as a lesson that we Albanians have learned from our very recent history. We saw this in Kosovo, where women were left behind to fend for their families and to pick up the pieces, where women were raped, tortured and killed as deliberate targets of a criminal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

We also see this in conflicts everywhere — from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Myanmar to Ethiopia to Syria, or in the repression against activists in Belarus. As the briefers also emphasized, women activists face threats and risks, including arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and even targeted killings — not just because of the usual risks inherent in such activities in conflict zones, but also because of the fact that they are women.

And yet I know, and we all know, that there is resistance to women having a say in how peace is achieved and how conflicts are resolved.

Thirty years ago, when my country began its long and difficult road towards reconstruction from decades of isolation and ruin under an extremely radical communist regime, we make the same mistake. We denied women a role in the reconstruction, reconciliation and the process of laying the foundations for our new Albania. We have paid for that mistake, but we have also learned from it.

I am proud that gender equality is now a high priority for the Albanian Government, not just in words and policy but also in actions and concrete achievements. Albania currently ranks among the top five gender-

balanced Governments in the world, with 75 per cent of ministerial posts held by women. A similar percentage of senior and mid-level executive posts, as well as some of the highest critical public positions, including independent institutions, agencies and departments in key State areas, are also held by women. We have benefited, and the whole country has benefited.

That is why we decided to make women and peace and security our top priority. It is in that spirit that we joined Norway, the United Arab Emirates and the Niger in the statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security in order to make that issue a top priority during our respective Security Council presidencies. However, we know that participation and protection go hand in hand. That is why I would also like to focus on a few key points.

First, we must support and resource relevant United Nations entities in order to enable them to provide all the necessary protection and support to women human rights defenders, peacebuilders and civil society representatives at risk of harm, including those who have briefed the Security Council or are otherwise engaged with the United Nations system.

Secondly, we must create flexible funding mechanisms to act fast and respond rapidly when women leaders are faced with threats and reprisals. The launch of the Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders earlier today is a positive development, and Albania will make a contribution to the fund.

Thirdly, we must improve funding of women-led and women's rights organizations and movements in fragile or conflict-affected countries.

Fourthly, we must enhance accountability with regard to women and peace and security by committing to a zero-tolerance policy on reprisals against women activists and human rights defenders.

The Council has a crucial and decisive role to play in that regard. There can be no peace without women, and it would be unforgivable to exclude half of humankind from efforts aimed at international peace and security.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): The United Arab Emirates thanks Norway for organizing this important open debate on such a critical subject and for presiding over this meeting. We also thank High Commissioner Bachelet for her insightful briefing. We listened carefully to the briefings from Ms. Zarqa Yaftali and Ms. Kaavya Asoka.

As the Foreign Minister of Albania just said, in order to maximize our impact as a new Security Council member, we have joined forces with the Niger, Norway and Albania in our statement of shared commitments on women and peace and security. We look forward to partnering with them and the entire membership in order to advance women and peace and security issues in a concrete way during our Council term.

As we deliver our first statement on a women and peace and security issue as an elected member of the Security Council, let me share how we plan to champion this agenda further. We will focus on a results-oriented approach, with the objective of moving the women and peace and security agenda out of its silos and into all discussions relevant to peace and security. In the past two decades, we have established a solid framework to achieve gender equality; however, gaps in its implementation remain. We will therefore prioritize action on existing frameworks to effectively contribute to advancing this agenda.

We want to promote a comprehensive approach that recognizes the integrated nature of the agenda. In addition to participation and protection, which we will focus on today, we will also emphasize prevention, economic relief and recovery. That is why we are planning, during our presidency in March, to hold a discussion on partnerships with the private sector and how they can support women's participation and inclusion in peace and security, which is an area of the agenda that remains underdeveloped.

Let me now turn to the key issue at hand. Women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and civil society representatives all play crucial roles in conflict and post-conflict settings. They bring gender perspectives to the forefront and contribute to building sustainable peace. We have seen, for instance, how their tireless efforts during Colombia's peace process resulted in one of the most inclusive peace agreements to date.

Yet time and again, these women face discrimination, intimidation, marginalization and violence. In particular, women advocating for their rights and inclusion in conflict situations face sexual and gender-based violence, including harassment and rape. Those reprehensible acts not only destroy the lives of individuals and communities, but also create an environment that corrodes the social fabric and undermines the prospects of peace and recovery.

The United Arab Emirates would like to highlight three recommendations for Member States and the United Nations that could prevent and respond effectively to reprisals in conflict and post-conflict settings:

First, Member States must take serious steps to tackle structural gender inequality as a main root cause of violence against women. Investing in education and reforming harmful antiquated policies can address and eliminate the reasons that drive stigmatization and targeted attacks. As Ms. Yaftali so eloquently affirmed earlier today, this is a very pressing need in places like Afghanistan today, as we witness an escalation in efforts to distort religion and culture in order to attack the fundamental right of women and girls to education. In the long-term, investing in equal access to education can ensure sustained protection for women, prevention of violence against them and commitment to their critical role in rebuilding more resilient and equitable communities.

Secondly, the United Nations itself needs to develop effective tools to address violence against women, including reprisals in contexts of armed conflict. That could include more systematic deployment of gender and women's protection advisers to United Nations peace operations, as well as increased data gathering and analysis for effective support of the strategies that actually work. For instance, at the end of a peace operation, we should work with host countries to ensure the continuity of key protection capabilities in United Nations country teams, so that women and their advocates are not abandoned at a critical time.

Thirdly, we urge the Security Council to remain open to the input of civil society briefers, particularly women. They provide unique and valuable insights to the Council on emerging issues and developments in situations on the agenda. Threats intended to deter civil society participation in Council meetings therefore constitute an attempt to obstruct the work of this organ. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates, alongside Norway, the Niger and Albania, committed to remain vigilant with Council briefers regarding reprisals, as well as to a zero-tolerance approach towards reprisals, as reflected in our shared women and peace and security presidency commitments.

In addition to acknowledging women's roles as active agents for peace and security, we must also recognize and act upon the many risks they face. That is necessary for ensuring women's full, equal and

meaningful participation across all sectors, which we already know is central to international peace and security.

The United Arab Emirates looks forward to cooperating with all members, the United Nations and civil society to explore avenues that best ensure women's safe participation in the Council and their significant contributions in this field.

A women's place is indeed exactly where she decides it should be.

Ms. Zeya (United States of America): I thank you, Foreign Minister Huitfeldt, for convening us to discuss this critical issue. We also thank High Commissioner Bachelet and the civil society briefers for their vital perspectives. We welcome your efforts, Madam President, to shine a light on the critical role that women peacebuilders play and steps that we all must take to empower and protect them.

Women are on the front lines of peacebuilding. They bring a unique understanding of local and regional dynamics to peace processes necessary for sustainable engagements. Their advocacy, however, also makes them targets for bad actors intending to exacerbate conflict. We think of the Head of the Somali Police Force's Sexual and Gender-based Violence Unit, who was physically assaulted by four police officers because she was reviewing the sexual violence cases registered at the central police station. Later a female journalist following up on the assault was detained. We strongly condemn those attacks and all similar threats to women peacebuilders. The Security Council must do much more to protect those women.

Threats to women peacebuilders are highly gendered, using their identity, roles and social norms against them, often through sexualized attacks. Increasingly, those attacks take place online, including through the spread of gendered disinformation and targeted cyberharassment.

Echoing the calls by our Albanian and United Arab Emirates colleagues, we call upon all Governments and international organizations to join the United States in maintaining and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. We must commit together to support institutions as they strengthen prevention efforts and safeguard survivor-centred response mechanisms and enforce accountability.

It is essential that we continue to increase the number of women peacekeepers and take measures to support their security. Women peacekeepers have unique access to communities. We must redouble efforts to promote human rights and protect civilians and enable women to become a meaningful part of peace and political processes. Women serve as powerful mentors for women and girls in post-conflict settings and are essential enablers for building trust and confidence with local communities while helping improve access to, and support for, local populations.

Language around protection has traditionally relied on a gendered narrative that portrays women as weak or vulnerable. That characterization perpetuates injustice. In fact, women peacebuilders are targeted because they are highly effective and powerful actors. As deft peacemakers who use dialogue to engage with different parties to foster peace, they successfully negotiate humanitarian access, counter violent extremist ideologies and facilitate reconciliation and healing.

The question we must ask ourselves is: how do we support and amplify those ongoing women-led peace efforts, and how do we prevent malign actors from sabotaging women peacebuilders? The United States is advocating with partner Governments to establish formal processes to ensure that women have influence in decision-making. We are also advocating for necessary technical support to amplify the existing efforts of women leaders. For example, in Colombia, we support the meaningful participation of women in local stabilization and peacebuilding institutions, and we advocate fuller implementation by the Government of Colombia of commitments in the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace to promote women's rights.

We note with concern that 10 of the 16 members of the Colombian Special Forum on Gender, which monitors the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement, reported threats made directly against them. One organization defending the rights of indigenous women had to withdraw temporarily owing to the severity of the threats. That is unacceptable.

The United States supports targeted foreign assistance programmes that further the leadership of local women in peacebuilding processes. At the December 2021 Summit for Democracy, we announced the Advancing Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Leadership Initiative. Under this mantle, the United

States will support SHE WINS — Supporting Her Empowerment: Women's Inclusion for New Security — through the provision of technical assistance and small grants to local women-led organizations. Activities will include women from ethnic and religious minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, plus persons, women, youth and women with disabilities, as well as men and boys who are champions for the promotion of equality and equity.

The United States remains fully committed to advancing resolution 1325 (2000) as a matter of international peace and security. Peace can never be achieved if half the population, particularly those at the forefront of peacebuilding, are routinely ignored or abused.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): It is great to see you, Madam President, with us in the Chamber today. Ireland and Norway have a proud history of working together to support human rights defenders. And I am so pleased that our shared priority is finding expression in this Chamber and at this table today.

I want to pay tribute to our briefers — High Commissioner Bachelet, Kaavya Asoka and Zarqa Yaftali. Their messages really inspire us. We hear what they say.

We just also heard the testimony of a remarkable Afghan woman. Foremost in my mind today, as we address violence targeting women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, are the women of Afghanistan. The women peacebuilders and human rights defenders of Afghanistan were sounding the alarm of imminent catastrophe long before the world was willing to heed them. Throughout the spring and early summer of last year, Afghan women leaders warned of surging violence and harassment against women and girls. In May, when a girls' school was attacked by the Taliban, they warned us that this was not collateral damage, that this was not incidental, that this violence was deliberate, targeted and symbolic, aimed at frightening women and girls away from participation in public life, and was a precursor to a terrible onslaught. And so it has proved.

Today in Afghanistan, women human rights defenders pay the price for our failure to heed their warnings. Women whom the international community once championed are hiding in their homes or have been forced to flee.

Women who have the courage to take to the streets to demand their human rights risk intimidation, violence, detention and worse. Some have never come home.

Afghanistan illustrates in the starkest way the intimate link between women's participation and their protection. But let there be no doubt: those issues are universal. The world over, politically active women are targeted for threats and violence, online and offline.

Full, equal and meaningful participation is simply not possible unless women can participate safely. That also applies to the Security Council itself. During Ireland's Security Council presidency in September, when we made a priority of giving a platform to women civil-society briefers, we became acutely aware of the grave risks that they face when seeking to engage with the United Nations and its Member States. I want to pay tribute to the 16 women who bravely accepted our invitation and to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and others who helped to mitigate the risks to the greatest extent possible.

However, some women declined to speak because of the risk it posed. One breifer we invited faced serious threats to her safety.

Simply put, it is not acceptable that women are silenced by the threat of reprisal. Neither should we, as Council members, collaborate in their silencing by not inviting them to speak. As Kaavya said earlier, we have a choice. The Council must reject any and all reprisals against briefers and ensure that it provides a safe platform in the Chamber.

We welcome Kaavya briefing us here in person today. We need to ensure that civil society returns in person to this horseshoe table. There is no substitute for women, I say it again, being in the room and at the table: that applies here and to every peace and political process, wherever that may be.

I will conclude by highlighting not what we say as Ireland but rather what we do to protect women's right to participate safely in peace and security processes.

We will continue to work with conviction to push recommendations to the Council on protecting women's participation, no holds barred. We will work to maximize the impact and political import of the Council's main instrument in that regard: the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security.

We will work to ensure that OHCHR activity on reprisals is resourced and funded. As a member of that core group, we will lead the Human Rights Council resolution on reprisals. We will support and speak out about the work of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor. We stand by organizations such as Frontline Defenders, which protect defenders at risk.

We will do everything we can as a champion of civil-society participation, including in-person participation, at the Security Council and across the United Nations. Women's voices need to be heard in these rooms, and we need to heed those women as we shape outcomes.

We will not turn away from our calls on the United Nations itself to insist on the safe participation of women in the peace processes it leads. Building on the Arria Formula meeting we hosted with Mexico last year, we will be vigilant and active on that matter.

Finally, Ireland's embassies worldwide stand ready, every day, to support human rights defenders at serious risk, acknowledging the heightened risk for women, as we did in the case of Afghanistan, when we prioritized women human rights defenders for humanitarian visa exemptions as they were needed. It is the least we can do.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the fact, Madam President, that you are presiding over this important meeting in your capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I listened attentively to the statements made by High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet and civil-society representatives Ms. Yaftali and Ms. Asoka. I note that I am the first male speaker to take the floor at this meeting. I should like to emphasize that despite that fact, China attaches high importance to the issue of women and peace and security and, like other countries, pays close attention to the protection of women's rights. We have been working actively and relentlessly towards that goal.

Protecting women in armed conflict and promoting their participation in political and peace processes is an important part of the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda. To achieve those goals, the Council must keep going in the right direction and stay on the right course.

China wishes to emphasize the following.

First, we must strengthen the protection of women in conflict areas in every way possible, making no exception. Women affected by armed conflict all are entitled to security and protection, regardless of whether or not they are part of the peace process. They should be treated equally, without exception.

The vast majority of such women are ordinary people. They are the Palestinian women living in constant fear of house demolitions, violence and attacks. They are the Afghan mothers looking for food and warm clothing for their children in the context of a humanitarian disaster aggravated by unilateral sanctions. They are the girls of the Sahel refusing to give up learning despite the spectre of terrorism and kidnapping by extremist forces. They are the most vulnerable group, one that deserves more than anyone else attention and help from the international community. Like everyone else, they have the right to live a life free from violence.

To protect them requires collective efforts. Parties to conflict should fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and renounce all violence against women, including sexual violence. China supports the relevant United Nations entities actively performing their duties in that regard.

The international community should intensify relief efforts in line with the United Nations guiding principles for humanitarian assistance and meet the basic living needs of conflict-affected women.

Countries with historical responsibility for hotspot issues are duty-bound to provide more financial and in-kind support.

Secondly, we must address both the symptoms and root causes of violence and conflict. The protection of women cannot be carried out amid wars and conflict; that cannot be achieved. In conflict situations, the risk of violence, displacement, poverty and famine often rise exponentially among women. We should be tough on violence against women, yet nothing can provide more basic protection for women than a holistic approach to conflict prevention and resolution.

Peace and stability can be restored only through dialogue and concertation between the parties concerned. Civil society can play a constructive role by advocating a culture of peace, being the voice of the people, promoting exchanges and mutual trust, and providing useful advice.

As an important voice for peace, women should be given equal opportunities to participate in peace negotiations. All parties should remove undue hindrances and ensure gender equality in political processes. The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and must work harder to address the root causes of conflicts, pursue political solutions to hotspot issues and unrelentingly seek the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue, mediation and consultations so that all women and girls can enjoy peace and live in tranquility.

Thirdly, the Council must unwaveringly support women's empowerment and development. Milestone resolution 1325 (2000) redefines the nexus between women and peace. As Secretary-General Guterres said,

"This was the first time women were recognized not only as victims of war but as people with their own agency and expertise, who are valuable assets to findings peaceful solutions to conflict."

Supporting women's empowerment, development, initiatives, participation and power to change in the area of peace and security can help ensure the steady and far-reaching impact of the women and peace and security agenda. We should strive to fill the development gap faced by women in conflict areas, prioritize development in the work of the United Nations and seek quick outcomes for the women-related Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We should effectively protect women's economic and social rights and guarantee their right to education, as knowledge can change lives.

We should help more women find employment, emerge from poverty and achieve economic autonomy to create the necessary conditions for their effective participation in peace processes. We should help women overcome the challenges related to the coronavirus disease pandemic, improve accessibility and the affordability of vaccines in conflict areas and safeguard women's right to life and health.

As the host country of the Fourth World Conference on Women, China always advocates gender equality and women's empowerment, promotes women's development globally and supports the woman and peace and security agenda with concrete actions. Over the past three decades, more than 1,000 Chinese women have served in United Nations peacekeeping operations, while making important contributions to peace.

In recent years, we have actively worked with other countries, especially developing countries. We have implemented 100 maternal and child health projects, trained 130,000 female professionals and significantly supported women's empowerment in those developing countries. China also partnered with UNESCO in establishing the Prize for Girls' and Women's Education to galvanize more people into taking action for that worthy cause.

The Global Development Initiative, presented by President Xi Jinping, seeks to build on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and global development, which will provide strong momentum for achieving equal rights for women and their advancement throughout the world. As is often said in China, women hold up half of the sky. We stand ready to work with the international community to promote women's empowerment and development, support the role of women in holding up half of the sky with regard to international peace and security and build a beautiful future together.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this debate. On behalf of the United Kingdom, I thank High Commissioner Bachelet, Ms. Yaftali and Ms. Asoka for briefing the Security Council on the realities faced by women defending and building peace across the globe.

As we have heard today, women human rights defenders and peacebuilders face violence and reprisals for doing their work — building and sustaining peace — which is central to the purpose of the Security Council. Such attacks obstruct women's meaningful participation in peace processes. The Council can operate effectively only when it receives honest briefings about situations on the ground. Women human rights defenders and peacebuilders who brief the Council provide such insights, and we depend on them. We have a duty to protect them and deal with reprisals effectively. Without adequate protection, violence will continue to serve as a means of silencing women's participation.

Only two years ago, the Council committed to ensuring a safe enabling environment for women peacebuilders and civil society in resolution 2493 (2019). I would like to focus today on three areas of practical action: addressing women's participation in country contexts, ensuring a safe environment for

women human rights defender and providing resources and practical support to women peacebuilders.

First, with regard to women's participation in country contexts, Ms. Yaftali spoke movingly about the resilience of Afghan women and girls despite the violence and discrimination that they face. Ensuring that Afghan women can safely participate in public life and shape their own futures is the best way to protect the progress achieved on gender equality. The empowerment of women and girls is fundamental to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Secondly, we must safeguard the participation of women in decision-making processes. It is not enough for women to participate in structures and institutions — such participation must also be meaningful. According to the research of the International Civil Society Action Network, enabling environments require the mainstreaming of protection in our women and peace and security policies and practices. Safe environments also depend on the establishment and support of women's mediator networks, as well as the development of security sector policies that respond to threats of reprisal.

Thirdly, we must act in our national capacities and through the United Nations to provide resources and political support for this agenda. The United Kingdom is wholly committed to preventing and responding to reprisals. Over the past two years, we have funded the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop guidance to prevent reprisals against civil society briefers to the Council, strengthen United Nations engagement with a coalition of Member States to take action against reprisals and provide field training for United Nations staff in assisting women peacebuilders at risk of reprisals.

We have provided more than \$300,000 to the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights to protect and relocate women human rights defenders under threat of reprisals. We will continue to work closely with peacebuilders and ensure that protection is at the heart of our new national action plan on women and peace and security.

The message from this meeting is clear. We must do everything within our means to protect women's participation in political and peace processes in countries like Afghanistan and before the Council itself.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity that Norway has provided in this open debate for us to follow the lead of those States that have insisted that the path towards sustainable peace is possible only if women's voices are protected, heard and taken into account in all international peace and security processes.

I also thank High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet, Ms. Zarqa Yaftali and Ms. Kaavya Asoka for their informative briefings.

The topic that brings us together today is of particular interest to my country, Gabon, especially as President Ali Bongo Ondimba has acknowledged the fundamental role of women in forging our Government's projects.

We note that international advocacy for the inclusion of women as key actors in peace and security processes is gaining momentum. There are encouraging signs of progress, especially with regard to gender parity within the United Nations system and peacekeeping missions, as mentioned in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2021/827). However, we are deeply concerned about the fact that women continue to pay a high price, in particular in countries in conflict.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2021/827) outlines the continuing violence against women and the violation of their rights, in particular in conflict-ridden regions of the world, along with their marginalization and exclusion from forums in which decisions on their future are taken, including disarmament bodies. It is a disturbing situation to which the international community, in particular the Security Council, should respond, especially with regard to the need to ensure women's full participation, not only in the public sphere but also in the area of security.

Gabon has adopted a human-centred approach. Our approach is holistic and inclusive and promotes women leaders as change agents and peacebuilders who have full control over their future, by enabling them, in times of peace, to take their key and rightful place in the socioeconomic and political landscape of Gabon. They can then fully and naturally participate in the various stages of mediation and political negotiations when crises arise.

That vision is demonstrated by the notable presence of women at the head of three of the four most important

institutions in Gabon — the Office of the Prime Minister, the Senate and the Constitutional Court, as well as at the head of several Government departments.

Furthermore, since its independence Gabon has been a pioneer in Africa in the recruitment of women into its armed forces, and several women have risen to the rank of General. We have therefore ushered in a new era that enables women to raise their country's flag, make history and inspire generations of young women and girls.

More than ever before, we must uphold the standard of inclusion and safeguard the participation of women, while ensuring that their voices are heard. That should bring about a radical breakthrough that ensures that the role of women is taken into account and guarantees their full participation in all stages of conflict prevention and conflict resolution for greater lasting peace. Such advocacy is based on the spirit of resolution 1325 (2000) and reinforced by subsequent resolutions.

We call for continued efforts at the global, national and local levels for the comprehensive, inclusive and substantive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and its related resolutions, including resolution 2493 (2019). We also call for enhanced integration of the gender dimension in peace issues.

In a world that faces new security challenges that have been exacerbated by an unprecedented health crisis, our response must involve everyone, including women. Make no mistake, history will judge each of us by the way we treat those whom Gisèle Halimi referred to as the other half of humankind, in particular by the principles, positions and attitudes that we adopt here in the Security Council.

It is time for the nations of the world to protect the voice of all peacebuilders, who even in extreme conditions and in regions affected by extreme violence demonstrate superhuman courage and extraordinary boldness and resilience. Those issues will be the focus of our presidency of the Security Council in October. The qualities demonstrated by women should inspire collective action for a safer and more peaceful world, in line with the expectations and legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the world.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to see you, Madam President, presiding over today's meeting of the Security Council.

We would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Ms. Zarqa Yaftali and Ms. Kaavya Asoka for their briefings.

The issue of women and peace and security has become an integral part of the overall process of peaceful conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. We believe that the benchmark that provides a unique road map for advancing the role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery, as well as for protecting women in conflict, is resolution 1325 (2000).

The world currently faces many crises. However, they are not all a threat to international peace and security. Properly implementing and leveraging resolution 1325 (2000) to ensure its effectiveness requires stringent compliance with its mandate and a consideration of women's issues in the context of the maintenance of international peace and security, with a special emphasis on the situations on the Council's agenda.

Russia welcomes the steady increase in the participation of women in peace processes, including in negotiations and peacekeeping. We welcome the increase in the contribution of women in addressing key issues of security, conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery. Without a doubt, such engagement is of vital importance as it helps to build trust and trust-based relations with local populations, to prevent violations against women and children, to ensure that violations are investigated and to ensure sustained recovery and rehabilitation of the victims of such violence.

We believe that more meaningful participation by women in peacekeeping is possible if the right conditions are put in place. In that regard, an important area on which efforts should be focused is to ensure women's access to resources and technologies, including the banking sector. There should also be a greater focus on the specific development issues faced by women, including poverty eradication and access for women to education in conflict-affected countries.

The family is particularly important. We must protect the institution of the family. At the same time, the participation of women in all aspects and stages of peacekeeping should not become an end in itself or merely a quota to be met. It should be carried out in a manner that reflects the unique context of each situation. At the same time, we should prioritize the

professionalism of women, as well as their personal interests and other challenges — for example, in the area of peacekeeping.

Regrettably, despite the multitude of efforts under way, women continue to fall victim to many different forms of violence. We are deeply concerned about instances of the maiming and murder of women, including as a consequence of the indiscriminate or excessive use of force. We deem it to be unacceptable for those crimes to be swept under the rug, or for them to be justified as inevitable and the results of so-called collateral damage.

Such crimes must be investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable. That should not apply only to crimes against women peacebuilders. We believe that the goal of every State is to ensure the safety and security of every citizen, without special emphasis on any particular category. It is clear that violence against women is unacceptable, not only in the area of peacekeeping but in all contexts. Such violence is unacceptable against anyone, irrespective of gender, race, language or belief.

It is our view that creating preferential processes for the protection of certain categories of participants in conflict resolution is not only counterproductive but also dangerous, as it may foment additional social tensions, set off new waves of conflict and exacerbate existing conflicts. It is evident that creating safe conditions for women's participation in conflict resolution requires that the safety and security of all participants in the process be established. That is the only way to ensure meaningful, robust and sustained peace.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm our focus on constructive cooperation with all States on issues relating to the equal participation of men and women in addressing security issues and conflict resolution in key forums, in line with relevant mandates.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): We thank Norway for convening today's open debate on this important topic. I would like, in particular, to welcome Her Excellency Ms. Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, among us. We thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, for her insights. I also thank the other briefers, Ms. Zarqa Yaftali and Ms. Kaavya Asoka, for their briefings.

Women's participation in public life and the elimination of violence against them are prerequisites for promoting lasting peace and security around the world. To promote an inclusive society, India firmly supports the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in political processes and decision-making. India has today moved from a paradigm of women's development to women-led development.

We now have more than 1.3 million elected women representatives at the grass-roots level who have taken up leadership roles in their local communities. We even have all-women *panchayats*, the grass-roots local bodies elected at the village level. Twenty Indian states have made provisions to reserve 50 per cent of total seats in legislative bodies at the local level for women.

During India's struggle for freedom, women were at the forefront of practically every aspect of our effort. This tradition continues to contemporary times as well. In 2007, India made history by deploying the first-ever all-female formed police unit for United Nations peacekeeping. This unit served in Liberia for a decade and through its work served as an example of how the deployment of more women uniformed personnel could help the United Nation in its efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

In order to strengthen women's participation in peace and political process, and to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, my delegation would like to highlight the following. First, States Members of the United Nations should identify and address barriers to the meaningful participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts and programmes. This requires devising a legislative and judicial framework, providing economic opportunities, undertaking institution- and capacity-building, ensuring accountability and checking impunity of those perpetrating violence against women.

Secondly, Member States must provide an environment conducive to the participation and inclusion of women in political processes and decision-making. A political environment based on the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law leads to furthering the role of women in nation-building and development. In this context, we underline once again the importance of inclusive and representative governance in Afghanistan, with the meaningful

participation of women, in accordance with resolution 2593 (2021), adopted on 30 August 2021.

Thirdly, in addition to political participation, we must equally focus in a holistic manner on the socioeconomic empowerment of women, including their access to credit, finance and technology. For example, a growing digital divide could have the potential to alienate women from mainstream agendas. Keeping this in mind, to minimize the gender divide, India has not only undertaken numerous citizen-centric digital initiatives but it has also focused these services towards women. We have opened online bank accounts for over 440 million people, of whom more than 55 per cent are women. During the coronavirus disease pandemic, this initiative helped in direct-benefit transfer to nearly 200 million women.

Fourthly, terrorism and violent extremism continue to be the biggest global threat to peace and security, and invariably women suffer disproportionately. Violence against women and girls perpetrated by terrorists remains rampant. It deserves strong condemnation and our special attention. It is important that the Council focuses its attention on the impact and consequences of terrorism on the rights of women.

Fifthly, women police officers and peacekeepers play an indispensable role in furthering the women and peace and security agenda. They are better able to gain the trust of a large but marginalized section of society. We therefore need more women in peacekeeping. India welcomes the uniformed gender parity strategy to increase the number of women peacekeepers. We also support increasing the deployment of women protection advisers for effective monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence in the field.

Sixthly, to address meaningfully and institutionally the inequalities and violence faced by women and to ensure their full participation in decision-making, the United Nations should provide support to Member States for institution- and capacity-building in post-conflict situations. Focusing on women in the process of peacebuilding is crucial.

Last but not least, news media, especially social media, have emerged as a platform that is increasingly being used by various actors, including terrorists, to amplify discriminatory ideas and promote violent radicalization. Women are often the victims of these online criminal acts. To counter this phenomenon, we

require a sincere, committed, non-discriminatory and collective effort through a whole-of-society approach.

In conclusion, I would like to paraphrase an eminent Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda and reiterate that just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, durable peace and development cannot be achieved without the other half being equally invested.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet for the wealth of information and ideas she brought to the Security Council today, as well as to civil society representatives, Ms. Zarqa Yaftali and Ms. Kaavya Asoka, for bringing us a view of the real world so valuable for today's open debate.

The women and peace and security agenda is a priority for Brazil's eleventh mandate as an elected member of the Security Council. At this new opportunity to actively work towards its substantive advancement, Brazil will spare no effort to provide a safe and enabling environment for women to have full, equal and meaningful participation in international peace and security.

Today's signature event is timely. One must not ignore the signs of increasing violence towards women human rights defenders, journalists, members of the judiciary and security forces in all regions of the globe. When evaluating progress in a particular country or region or when designing mandates, members of the Security Council must take the situation of women seriously into account.

As Norway rightfully points out in the concept note for this meeting (S/2022/22, annex) and as mentioned in the latest report of the Secretary General on women and peace and security (S/2021/827), the situation of Afghan women and girls stands out as a source of concern. If it was grave before the Taliban took power, it is even worse now.

The Brazilian Government has launched a humanitarian visa and residence-permit scheme for Afghans and all those affected by the crisis in Afghanistan. Recently, through an initiative jointly undertaken by the Government and civil society in Brazil, we welcomed female Afghan judges and their families to our country.

Nevertheless, measures of solidarity, relevant as they are, are not sufficient. We must condemn all actions that hinder the meaningful and purposeful

participation of women in peace processes and in society in general. The Security Council must work not only to bring women to peace negotiation tables but also to find ways to protect those invited to the table and those working on the ground from direct violence and intimidation.

By protecting those women already trying to make a difference to their communities, the Security Council is also making it clear that without the participation of the female population, there are no prospects for lasting peace in any country, let alone economic development. Normalizing the participation of women in peace processes and upgrading their role, including as briefers to the Security Council, is a very concrete way to implement the women and peace and security agenda. In that regard, we commend Ireland for setting a new record of female briefers during its presidency in September and hope it becomes common practice to invite women affected by armed conflicts to a seat at the table — both in their home countries and here in this Chamber.

Brazil suggests another important concrete action in the light of the targets set forth by the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy — a thorough evaluation of the situation of female peacekeepers and peacebuilders as part of any examination of a country or region under its scrutiny. The idea is to set specific goals in order to work towards an increase in the number of women in field missions and to make sure that those women are able to make a difference, in various roles and functions, and to act as drivers of change.

Before concluding, I would like to quote Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, at October's debate on women and peace and security: "We cannot expect women to build peace if their lives are constantly under threat." (*S/PV.8886, p. 5*)

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the holding of this debate at the initiative of Norway. We thank High Commissioner Bachelet and the speakers from civil society for their briefings. Through them, we highlight the indispensable role of all women peacebuilders and defenders of rights.

This meeting is also timely, considering the extremely serious threats looming at this very moment over the women of Afghanistan. Our discussions focused on violence, intimidation and reprisals against women in peace processes. France is concerned by the increase in such acts. We condemn all attempts to

impede the participation of women in peace processes. It is unacceptable that anyone should be targeted as part of their commitment to peace. Such attacks are contrary to all the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. They require us to act.

First of all, fear must change sides. The perpetrators of such acts must be held accountable and brought to justice.

Secondly, in accordance with the resolutions on women and peace and security, States must create safe conditions for women activists to carry out their activities without undue interference. Prevention and early-warning mechanisms must be put in place, with the support of the United Nations, where relevant.

Thirdly, we call on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue its documentation efforts and to identify good practices in this area. Strong support must be provided to all civil society actors who may be subject to threats, intimidation or reprisals.

Finally, we must continue our efforts to fully implement all resolutions on women and peace and security.

France is implementing an ambitious feminist diplomacy. In June 2021, in partnership with Mexico, UN-Women, civil society and young people, France hosted the Generation Equality Forum in Paris. The meeting launched a new dynamic, based on strong commitments to the rights of women and girls. More than \$40 billion in funding was announced to support a global plan to accelerate equality by 2026. France also wants to set an example at home. My country therefore published its third national action plan on women and peace and security in June 2021. It also joined the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.

In the Security Council, as in all forums, France will continue to ensure that civil society actors can participate in all relevant discussions and that they can speak without fearing for their safety. Rest assured that France will continue its determined action in favour of the full implementation of all resolutions on women and peace and security and, in particular the provisions relating to the fight against reprisals.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this important debate and coming all the way to New York at a time when travel

is not as easy as it used to be. I also want to thank you for your presidency of the Security Council, which, so far, has impressed us as thoughtful, generous and well-managed. I would like to thank the briefers for their observations and the work they are undertaking to advance this important agenda.

Kenya places great value on the work of women peacebuilders. That includes amplifying their voices and bolstering their contributions in conflict prevention and peacemaking, both in Kenya and in our immediate region.

The safety of women participating in peace and security processes is a fundamental key to the success of the women and peace and security agenda. At the grass-roots and national levels, there should be sustained efforts to protect the safety of human rights defenders, gender equality advocates and civil society representatives, as outlined in resolution 2493 (2019). We therefore welcome the focus of this open debate as a crucial implementation step by all countries and by the United Nations.

I will propose, briefly, four arguments that I hope offer opportunities for practical implementation.

First, States must increase prosecutions for gender-based violence and its manifestation in sexual violence, harassment, attacks, reprisals, online intimidation and physical violence against women participating in the peace agenda. The Security Council should also take specific steps to increase the costs of intimidating, threatening or harming women who have briefed the Security Council.

Secondly, Kenya urges the international community to support regional efforts that safeguard the women and peace and security pillars of protection and participation. In particular, we call on the Council to note and support the outcomes of the African Union Peace and Security Council ministerial-level meeting held on 22 March under Kenya's chairmanship, on the theme "Women, Peace, Culture and Gender Inclusivity in Africa".

Thirdly, Kenya calls for the linking of the women and peace and security agenda with counter-radicalization mechanisms relevant to the sexual and gender-based violence reflected in the actions and ideologies of terrorists groups affiliated with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. We should all be aware that the cause and ideology of those groups

places the silencing, intimidation and retaliation against women as a core value and seeks to totally exclude them from civic life.

Resolution 2242 (2015) should not be a stand-alone resolution. Instead, its aims should be linked to relevant actions under resolutions that are specifically focused on countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. This is simply because multiple extremist groups all seem to have a common disregard for the participation, safety and security of women and girls.

Examples of such a linkage include, but are not limited to, resolutions 2354 (2017) and 2178 (2014) and their touching on countering terrorism narratives ensuring that they include narratives that are supportive of the women and peace and security agenda. Resolution 2331 (2016) takes on transnational organized crime, including human trafficking, kidnapping and sexual violence and enslavement. It should be specifically implemented with due regard to women and peace and security and resolution 2242 (2015).

I want to commend the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for its efforts so far to deploy a gender unit. We also appreciate its ongoing mainstreaming of gender in counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism. We think that work can be advanced further by its cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to assess the extent to which sanctions are related to the violence and terrorist operations targeting women. They can propose specific ways in which the Security Council and States can deploy sanctions that better protect women and girls from terrorists.

The Kenyan delegation notes that resolution 1960 (2010) seeks in particular the listing of perpetrators in sanctions regimes and reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence. Resolution 2242 (2015) usefully includes terrorist groups and proposes putting in place a stand-alone designation criterion for acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence and targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict.

Despite the existence of such lists of persistent perpetrators, parties and individuals, the majority of which are non-State actors and several of which are designated as terrorist groups and are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence, there has been little remedial or accountability action for the perpetrators.

Impunity still prevails, and it is in the power of the Security Council to do something about it.

More needs to be done on the implementation and operationalization of such recommendations in order to strengthen accountability for sexual and gender-based violence, including through the work of women's protection advisers in the framework of cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

The protection of women impels the Security Council to do more to enable African forces that seek to fight terrorism in the Sahel and other parts of Africa to be more effective. Supporting United Nations-assessed contributions to those security efforts would directly help women and their security.

The final recommendation is really to note what is most obvious — but perhaps for that reason is easily left out — which is that the greatest protection for the security and safety of women and girls is a competent, inclusive Government. To get competent Government, one needs reform and resources. We speak a lot about reform at the United Nations but perhaps too little about resources. A growing economy is necessary to raise taxes, which in turn are necessary to provide the basic services and security that are required, in addition to providing the livelihoods that women need to secure their own safety, security and autonomy.

Therefore, we believe that it is crucial that we bring development back to the conversation in the Security Council and at the United Nations as a whole, because the basis of State action must be resourced Governments. In that regard, even as we argue about the transition to net zero and the transition to a green economy, we need to note that those transitions cannot be achieved at the expense of the desire and the need for development of the countries in the global South, particularly in Africa. We will keep repeating that the most peace-positive action that we can undertake at the United Nations is to enable a green transition that is positive for African development and economic growth.

I want to conclude by reaffirming that Kenya is a champion of the women and peace and security agenda. We have a national action plan that we are busy implementing to reflect our commitment to the national, regional and global equality of women and their safety and security.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are pleased that you, Madam President, are presiding over this debate on protecting women against violence in peace and security processes, which is of the utmost importance for Mexico.

We thank Ms. Michelle Bachelet for her briefing and greatly appreciate the participation of Ms. Kaavya Asoka, with whom we have been able to collaborate in the past, as well as of Ms. Zarqa Yaftali.

Mexico reiterates its commitment to the women and peace and security agenda. Our commitment to, and activism on, the issue is in line with our feminist foreign policy. We pay tribute to Almaas Elman, a Somali activist murdered in Mogadishu at the end of 2019; Hanane Al-Barassi, a prominent Libyan lawyer killed in 2020; the Afghan journalists killed in Jalalabad in March 2021; and all women activists, peacebuilders and courageous human rights defenders who have been victims of threats, violence or reprisals. Their absence reminds us that we have failed to ensure safe environments for them to participate in the public and political life of their countries.

Mexico calls on the Security Council to speak out when it becomes aware of those situations, and thereby send an unequivocal message of rejection. The peacebuilders who come before the Security Council to report on the situations in their countries should be given special attention, as in doing so they risk their lives and those of their families.

During our presidency in November 2021, all briefers were women, and we are grateful to them because they were essential for the successful conclusion of our programme of work.

We recognize the work carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the area of the protection of women briefers, and we call on it to coordinate with other entities of the United Nations system on a better structured protocol for the protection and monitoring of individual cases that require it, as well as on keeping the Security Council and the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security updated so that we can react in a timely fashion.

As co-Chair of the Informal Group, together with Ireland, Mexico reiterates its call for all peace processes to systematically include women from the beginning of negotiations and at all decision-making levels.

Threats, reprisals, hate speech, sexual violence or any other form of violence directed at women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders are unacceptable. We must strive to eradicate them.

But we need more effective protection mechanisms — and if possible preventive protection mechanisms — and civil society, above all women, should participate in their design and execution. The objective must be none other than to achieve greater protection against the many forms of discrimination, whether based on race, age, place of origin, belief, sexual orientation, migratory status, disability or other distinctions.

Impunity and the lack of accountability for perpetrators are also unacceptable, as they propitiate new cycles of violence. Every State must guarantee access to justice and the provision of services for victims — sexual and reproductive health services, mental health services and other means of psychosocial support.

In conclusion, we must ensure that all peace operations mandated by the Council are equipped with the material and human resources necessary to oversee and provide such protection to everyone participating in them. To that end, we will have to begin by regularly and continuously listening to their experiences, requests and recommendations.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

I would like to start by thanking the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for briefing the Security Council today and providing the context for this important debate. I thank Ms. Yaftali for her powerful intervention. It is very important for the Council to hear first-hand accounts such as hers. I also thank Ms. Asoka for her coalition's guidance on how we can improve the situation for women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, as well as the more than 50 civil society experts who convened to discuss the issue of reprisals last week. Their recommendations will be shared and will guide our work going forward. I also thank all Council members and the broader United Nations membership for engaging in this difficult topic.

While we may disagree on some areas, we all agree that women have a fundamental right to participate in peace and security. It is not because women by nature carry some magical solution to end all wars or because

we are much more peaceful than men — but because women carry unique perspectives and experiences in their communities. When women participate, peace lasts longer.

However, far too often taking part means becoming a target. Whenever women speak up, we risk more than men, and women peacebuilders and human rights defenders risk more than anyone. Where they should receive recognition, they get threats and violence instead. That means that we must find better ways to strengthen our prevention and response measures in order to protect and empower women and promote and safeguard their right to participate. With that in mind, Norway wishes to make three recommendations.

First, women's participation must become the new normal. Participation is the long-term game-changer. When women can directly influence decisions about peace and security, they shape protection measures that work for them and their families and communities.

Secondly, we must provide the resources needed to support women peacebuilders and human rights defenders at all levels of society and ensure that relevant United Nations entities are set up to do the same.

Thirdly, there must be zero tolerance for threats and reprisals that target women in peace and security processes, including by engaging with the Council.

However, women will continue to participate despite the risks they face. We see that in Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Mali and many other places. If the worst happens, we must ensure an adequate response. We should consider sanctions and other deterrent measures, and we must demand accountability. Earlier today, Norway participated in the launch of a new funding mechanism that aims to provide protection. That is a safety net, and it can provide assistance when needed.

Too often women are told that security comes first before their participation, resulting in neither participation nor security. It is a false trade-off. If peace and security really are the aim and protecting women is the aim, participation is the only way to achieve those aims. Therefore, we must protect participation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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 representative of Japan.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to Norway for convening this important debate on women and peace and security, with a focus on creating a safe and enabling environment for women. I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the civil society representatives for their briefings.

First of all, Japan shares the deep concerns about attacks against women human rights defenders, journalists and others, to which the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/827) on women and peace and security alerts us. We are also deeply impressed by the report's analysis of the goal of reversing the rise in global military spending and ensuring greater investment in human security. As the report states in paragraph 1, "[G]reater investment in the social infrastructure and services that buttress human security" is what we really need for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. That is particularly true in the context of women and peace and security.

United Nations agencies and local non-governmental agencies can certainly play a key role in supporting and protecting women in engaging in peace and security processes. Japan has been actively supporting the capacity-building of local women peacebuilders through a number of UN-Women projects. In order to cope with ongoing threats and violence against Afghan women, including human rights defenders, Japan decided to fund a new UN-Women project that supports local civil society organizations that operate shelters and community-based centres for survivors of violence.

In the long-term, however, there is no magic solution to create a lasting safe and enabling environment for women, but instead we must build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that are owned by each country and can protect and empower people and foster trust in society.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has brought to the forefront online violence as a new form of threat that targets women human rights defenders. Japan supports the ongoing study by UN-Women in 21 Arab countries, with a specific focus on online violence

against women, including women activists and human rights defenders. It aims to clarify the gaps in the legal systems in order to prevent online violence and identify challenges in reporting and accessing services. The project will also facilitate the mapping of existing laws. We hope that the findings of the project will contribute to strengthening institutional capacity in the region to cope with the new threat.

In conclusion, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders requires long-term collective efforts. Japan is committed to play its part in that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malta.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): Malta thanks the delegation of Norway for holding today's open debate on the theme "Protecting participation: addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes". We welcome the momentum created in the area of women and peace and security over the past months and reiterate the importance of ensuring that we all remain seized of the women and peace and security agenda.

I also thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her insightful remarks, as well as today's briefers for sharing their experiences and concerns. It is important for the international community to recognize and support the work they carry out.

Malta aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, advocates for gender equality, politicians, journalists and other members of civil society play a crucial role in advancing the common goals of peace, justice, human rights and accountability. Regrettably, they are under continuous attack for doing so. Let us be clear that that is unacceptable and that such actions must be condemned in the most unequivocal manner.

More than two years have passed since the adoption of resolution 2493 (2019), but more decisive action is needed to address violence, threats and harassment, both online and offline. Our shared goal of women's full, equal and meaningful participation, in all their diversity and in all stages of peace processes, cannot be achieved if they fear for their lives and the lives of their families. That shared goal must be at the centre of

all our efforts, since the participation and leadership of women are essential for achieving sustainable peace.

The participation and protection pillars of the women and peace and security agenda are closely related. There cannot be participation without protection. The prompt investigation of intimidation, threats, violence and other abuses against women in peace and security processes, including women human rights defenders, should be undertaken if we are to narrow the gap in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. The State has the primary responsibility to ensure an enabling and secure environment for all women in peace processes, and the United Nations must lead by example.

United Nations special missions on the ground have a responsibility to support and protect them. No civil society member should fear retaliation for engaging with the United Nations. The Security Council has a strong mandate to address those issues and has repeatedly urged Member States to act to that end. Existing frameworks must be allocated the necessary resources to be fully implemented. Member States must also be more vocal to consistently defend civil society space and condemn attacks against it.

Today we reiterate our call to respect and protect those at the centre of the women and peace and security agenda and underscore the importance of inclusive peace processes. Women have a crucial role to play in shaping the future of the societies in which they live and must be at the negotiating table. In doing so, we will give long-term peace a significantly better chance, for without women there is no peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Malovrh (Slovenia): Allow me to thank the delegation of Norway for organizing today's debate. I thank all speakers for their briefings and testimonies.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add the following statement in our national capacity.

It has been well established that only those peace and political processes that are truly inclusive are likely to bring about durable solutions and sustainable peace. It is high time that we effectively remove the existing barriers to the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes and prevent violence against women, which continues to be a

major impediment to their participation in peace and security processes.

Women peacebuilders, political leaders, activists and human rights defenders play a crucial role in advancing peace, human rights and gender equality. We condemn in the strongest terms all acts of intimidation, threats and violence against women. Women deserve our full support and a safe and enabling environment to effectively engage in peace processes and carry out their valuable work.

Alarming levels of all forms of violence against women, including political violence targeting women, make our deliberations today particularly timely. Slovenia reaffirms its full support for the women and girls of Afghanistan. Their free and equal participation and respect for their human rights are prerequisites for building a peaceful, sustainable and resilient Afghan society.

When intimidation and violence are directed at women for exercising their right to participate in public and political life, the Security Council should not remain silent. It must act to protect the space and voices of civil society and women human rights defenders and peacebuilders and to condemn any violence and attacks against them. Acts of reprisals against members of civil society who cooperate with the United Nations or against those who brief the Security Council should not go unaddressed. Impunity for any violence, in particular violence targeting women, must be prevented and accountability ensured.

Slovenia places great importance on promoting the women and peace and security agenda, in particular women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes. We also regularly deploy women uniformed personnel to peace operations and missions, including in senior roles. Women hold leading positions in the Slovenian armed forces in functional areas and command tactical units, both at home and in contingents abroad.

As part of Slovenia's commitment to the women and peace and security agenda, we established the Special Centre for Education and Training for Participation in Peacekeeping Operations and Missions. An important part of the educational programme provided by the new Centre focuses on the needs of local communities, in particular the rights of women and girls. Furthermore, in the context of implementing the women and peace and security agenda, Slovenia funds several projects

addressing challenges related to gender-based violence in the Western Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa.

In conclusion, I would like to express Slovenia's full commitment to its collective efforts in preventing attacks against women human rights defenders, peacebuilders and civil society leaders, as well as ensuring a safe and inclusive space in our quest for durable international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rae (Canada): I am very pleased to speak on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, which is an informal network of 65 Member States representing all five regional groups of the United Nations and the European Union.

The Group thanks the delegation of Norway for convening today's debate. I thank you very much, Madam President, for highlighting the important link between the protection of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders and their participation in advancing peace and security. We wish to emphasize three points.

First, we condemn all threats, harassment, attacks and reprisals against women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and gender equality advocates. In line with resolution 2493 (2019), we urge all Member States to address those issues, both online and offline, as well as all forms of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against them. We also urge Member States to hold accountable all perpetrators of such acts. We are more than concerned about the fact that some women have faced reprisals for briefing the Council. The Security Council and the United Nations system must develop effective measures to prevent and respond to those reprisals.

Secondly, we call on all Member States to create safe and enabling environments for women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and gender equality advocates. They must receive the support they need to carry out their work safely, independently and without undue interference. That support includes promoting the human rights of women and girls, building the capacity of national institutions to ensure the protection of peacebuilders, developing local early-warning mechanisms and supporting at-risk individuals. It is essential that we work directly with

those who are targeted to understand the threats they face and work in partnership with them to identify ways to effectively strengthen their protection and put an end to those threats.

We support the Security Council's incorporation and application of sexual violence as a designation criterion in United Nations sanctions regimes. We also encourage the Council to ensure that peace operations provide, monitor and report on gender-responsive support to peacebuilders and human rights defenders at risk.

Finally, we encourage the United Nations, its States Members, international financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders to provide rapid, flexible and real funding for the protection of women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and gender-equality advocates, particularly those in need of emergency assistance, including psychosocial support. Collectively, we can and must do more to support all women on the front lines of peace and security efforts.

(spoke in French)

Very briefly, on behalf of Canada, I would like to add that the danger women face reflects the reality of violence against women around the world, including in Canada, for, in my country too, women who dedicate their lives to democracy, peace and justice are threatened and even attacked, both virtually and physically. Aboriginal women, racialized women and other women who already face many other forms of discrimination are particularly targeted simply because they are women and because they exercise their human rights.

We must act together now and put in place the safe conditions that the Council called for in resolution 2493 (2019). We cannot afford to remain passive in the face of issues of women's safety.

(spoke in English)

Let me close by saying this: women are telling us very clearly around the world and in this Chamber and in the General Assembly Hall what they need for their support and what they need for their protection. We must keep asking questions. But, above all, we must now listen to what we are hearing, and we must act.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of New Zealand.

New Zealand thanks Norway for choosing to focus on women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes as today's theme. We fully support Norway's commitment to elevating participation during its Council presidency and are committed to advancing the shared goal across all United Nations forums.

Despite the fact that resolution 1325 (2000) urges all actors to increase the participation of women and the incorporation of gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts, the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2021/827) highlights persistent and troubling gaps in delivery on the resolution. This includes the need to strengthen protection measures for women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and civil society representatives.

Today's debate is an opportunity to collectively take stock of how far we have come and what more remains to be done. States Members of the United Nations must be bold, and they must be consistent in their condemnation of those who silence women involved in peace processes or any other context and hold perpetrators to account without exception.

New Zealand calls on all Member States to continue to seek innovative and sustainable ways to create safe and enabling environments for women and girls in all of their diversity. Unambiguous, resourced, responsive and operationally focused initiatives based on Member States' shared best practices should be implemented in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

In the context of today's debate, based on lessons we have learned, New Zealand recommends the following initiatives for consideration to enhance the operational effectiveness of peacekeepers.

First, we recommend the adoption of an initiative to support gender analysis. From the outset of any process, gender analysis is fundamental to understanding and supporting decision makers within peacekeeping operations and the host country. Understanding gendered cultural dynamics helps to identify challenges and potential solutions to the complex issues of peacebuilding and peacemaking.

Secondly, New Zealand has seen first-hand the immense value of promoting gender-sensitive

peacekeeping personnel that understand the local environment and the people they are deployed to serve. This has rung true in our experience of peacemaking efforts in the South Pacific, including the very recent operations in the Solomon Islands.

Thirdly, the power of diverse teams not only improves performance but also promotes inclusion and equality, and this is a key hallmark of New Zealand's approach in peace and security and beyond. The Wahine Toa leadership programme, designed to increase women participation in the New Zealand Defence Forces, including peacekeeping operations, provides a proven model.

It is clear from listening to our two female civil society briefers today that their voices and the diverse voices of female civil society are indispensable to advancing women's involvement in peace processes. No women peacebuilders should have their right to participate curtailed in any way, in particular by the threat of violence, intimidation or reprisals. Any reprisals against civil society briefers for merely briefing the Council, as others have mentioned this morning already, are an affront to their basic human rights to participate and to share their experience. We need to leverage this expertise if we want to build peace in all of the conflicts we are witnessing today.

New Zealand will serve on the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2022 and continues to support the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, and with this we are committed to advancing the Peacebuilding Commission's gender strategy to ensure that sustained gender-responsive engagement is embedded in all aspects of United Nations peacebuilding work. Inclusion is fundamental to sustainable peace, and we will seek to ground our engagement in gender-responsive peacebuilding, bringing women's diverse perspectives to the fore. This is our steadfast commitment.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog: I offer my congratulations to Norway for presiding over the Security Council this month and for making this issue a high priority of its presidency.

I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania; the

country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate, Bosnian and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

We have a lot to say on this subject, and we will distribute our full statement through other means. I will now present an abbreviated version.

Supporting independent civil society organizations, enabling civic space and protecting human rights defenders and peacebuilders are key priorities of the EU. We deplore that women peacebuilders mediators, journalists, politicians, humanitarian workers, civil society leaders and human rights defenders face increasing and specific challenges that often hamper their ability to act.

Worldwide, we have seen the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls. We are deeply concerned about the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war in Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray region, and the persistent threats of violence facing women in such countries as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Yemen.

With regard to Afghanistan, the EU has strengthened its support to Afghan women at risk, including through a dedicated programme on human rights defenders. The protection of the human rights of Afghan women and girls must be an integral part of the political priorities. We, the EU, have responded very generously to the humanitarian appeals, and for good reasons, but broader support will depend on Afghanistan's respect of international human rights frameworks and norms.

During the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and other programmes, we identified six recommendations to strengthen prevention and response to threats.

First, systematic gender mainstreaming based on targeted analyses should be applied to all actions.

Secondly, visibility can be a powerful tool to ensure protection if pursued in close consultation with the women concerned.

Thirdly, special attention should be given to those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, particularly young and older women, women with disabilities, indigenous

women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons

Fourthly, we must do more to fight impunity. We reiterate our support to the International Criminal Court and call on the Security Council to incorporate and apply sexual and gender-based violence in conflict as a designation criterion in United Nations sanction regimes.

Fifthly, political dialogues and diplomatic efforts are important to promote prevention and accountability.

Sixthly, funds should be allocated to support protection measures. In that regard, we congratulate the initiative presented today. The EU's Human Rights Defenders Mechanism, for example, has an operational budget of €15 million for three years, and any human rights defender at risk can apply for protection.

The Security Council has a strong mandate to tackle these issues. The existing frameworks must be given the necessary attention and resources to be fully implemented. The High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office have a key role to play in that regard, as we heard today. We encourage increased cooperation between the High Commissioner and the Security Council on these matters.

Lastly, civil society must be part of the solution. We congratulate you, Madam President, for inviting today's briefers, whose work is commendable. We urge the members of the Council to continue to invite more women human rights defenders and civil society leaders to brief the Council, while taking all the necessary precautions to ensure their safety. The innovative women and peace and security trio presidency launched by Ireland, Kenya and Mexico last year and the ongoing presidency initiative by the Niger, Norway, Albania and United Arab Emirates are positive steps in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): We welcome Norway's initiative to convene this open debate and are grateful to the briefers for their contributions.

Italy aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU) and with the one delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

We fully share the urgent need to create an environment that can enable women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and civil society representatives to carry out their work in complete safety. In order to achieve that objective, we must do all we can to stop the current trend of growing targeted violence against women in peace processes. International cooperation must be strengthened in order to support effective prevention and response strategies.

The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of human life requires uprooting gender and sexual-based violence. At the same time, women's participation in the decision-making process is one of the main tools for preventing violence by means of increasing the recognition of women's role within national societies. The two dimensions are therefore deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements need to be inclusive: all civil society voices should be heard and given the opportunity to play their role in building a sustainable future. In particular, women's participation increases considerably the probability of durable peace agreements.

Italy has been supporting resolution 1325 (2000) since its adoption, and the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda remains a priority of our foreign policy. We are currently in the implementation phase of our fourth national action plan on women and peace and security, corresponding to the 2020-2024 period. At the same time, we continue to engage with our EU partners in the implementation of the relevant EU Action Plan for the 2019-2024 term.

Promoting women's participation in mediation is one of our main and long-standing objectives. In 2017, Italy promoted the launch of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, which now brings together more than 60 qualified women mediators from 21 countries from the Mediterranean region.

We also remain committed to providing our peacekeeping troops with targeted training on gender issues and to promoting the presence of women in their ranks, in line with resolution 2538 (2020). Italy supports the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative and the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation by United Nations peacekeepers. We joined the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in 2015, as well as the voluntary compact, through which Member States committed to take measures to prevent and fight sexual

exploitation and abuse. We are also part of the Circle of Leadership, launched by the Secretary-General in 2017 to prevent and react to sexual exploitation and abuse within United Nations operations.

We remain seriously concerned about the use of sexual violence and the persisting threat of violence against women in several countries in conflict situations. In Afghanistan in particular, we reaffirm the need to ensure that respect for the human rights of Afghan women and girls be an integral part of the present and future of the country. That need was at the centre of the ministerial event that Italy successfully organized on the margins of the past General Assembly high-level week, and it will continue to inform our policy and action towards Afghanistan.

Lastly, we wish to reaffirm our full support for the efforts of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and express the hope that increased cooperation between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council can decisively help to prevent targeted violence against women and make sure that can women play a full role in peace and security processes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank Norway for convening this meeting on such an important issue, and also thank all the briefers for their inspiring insights.

Violence, intimidation and threats that target women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are on the rise. Such actions, aimed at preventing women from engaging politically and curbing their public activity, have a detrimental impact on crisis prevention and post-conflict recovery in general. This negative phenomenon represents a serious threat to peace, democracy and human rights.

In that regard, United Nations peacekeeping and political missions play an important role. It is therefore indispensable to mainstream women's protection, prevention and monitoring mandates in the daily activities of the United Nations missions. Among the key conditions for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes are adequate and effective protection mechanisms. Those instruments should be focused on addressing the issue of the impunity of the perpetrators, as well as on efforts to support the victims of such crimes

against women. We should also prioritize the expertise of women peacebuilders and cooperation between peacekeeping operation personnel and local women leaders in order to develop targeted strategies that aim to identify risks and potential threats.

Women leadership still needs recognition. Political and financial measures need to be employed to further promote the role of women and their impact on peace and security processes. We need to use all available forums to promote the full implementation of all principles of the women and peace and security agenda. In particularly difficult contexts where women's right to participate is poorly recognized and poorly protected, we need to pressure the parties concerned to include women at all stages of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding process and guarantee their protection and security.

In United Nations-led mediation processes, the participation of women should be a prerequisite. In order to amplify women's voices and leadership, we need to build a secure, safe and enabling environment and provide them with adequate technical, financial and political support. The sustainability of gains related to the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda remains a challenge, especially in post-conflict and transition contexts.

Peacekeepers should consult systematically and inclusively with civil society, including women-led organizations, in order to identify transition priorities and potential protection gaps. It is vital to ensure that, when peacekeepers are drawn down, the United Nations country team and other United Nations agencies be provided with an adequate early-warning mechanism and response capabilities regarding potential violence against women.

Let me also stress that the protection of human rights defenders is among the main priorities of Poland's current mandate on the Human Rights Council, as well as one of the key issues addressed in the Polish national action plan on women and peace and security. Support for civil society organizations and human rights defenders also constitutes one of the priorities of Polish development cooperation.

Finally, I would like to underscore the importance of making the goals of the women and peace and security agenda a reality. This agenda, which stems from the need to ensure more equality in reality, serves as a framework for efforts, actions and activities aspiring

to address the multidimensional challenges that women and girls face while trying to build sustained peace.

Complex security circumstances require a plurality of methods and approaches. In order to enhance the protection of women and human rights defenders, adequate legal and political support need to be guaranteed. Long-term policies and procedures need to be strengthened and coordination mechanisms need to be developed. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved need to be clarified in order to allow for an effective and constructive response to threats against women peacebuilders. The recent surge in violence that targets women who participate in peace and security processes show that much more still needs to be done in that area.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): It is good to be back in this Chamber, especially for a topic as important as women and peace and security. I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement by the European Union.

Estonia strongly condemns the persistent threats and attacks against women human rights defenders and peacebuilders both online and offline.

Women peacebuilders are often among the few people with the courage to speak up for change and for peace. Yet often Governments and warring parties do not have the courage to hear them out. Instead, women are silenced through violence or threats of it. That includes situations on the Security Council's agenda ranging from Afghanistan to Yemen and Haiti.

The targets of those threats include, somewhat unbelievably, the women who address the Security Council, whose only weapons are their words, which are focused on reaching peace. We cannot afford their silence, which would undermine the work of the Council on peace and security. Afghanistan is a warning example of the impact of the removal of women from the political and peace process.

The Security Council, like the rest of the United Nations, has been slow in addressing those risks, often failing to reach agreement on whether such women human rights defenders exist at all.

We need the commitment of all States to protect the freedom of expression and association and the lives of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, including by adopting measures to support them in line with Council resolutions.

We need condemnation by the Security Council of attacks directed at women human rights defenders, including those addressing the Council, as well as the continued adoption and use of sanctions in connection with sexual- and gender-based violence.

We need to ensure real accountability to increase the currently negligible cost of attacks on women peacebuilders, including through national legal systems and international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court, while offering protection and support to those who bring complaints.

As we experienced during our membership of the Security Council, we need broadly established procedures, information exchange and guidelines at the United Nations level, which need to be developed in consultation with women human rights defenders.

We also need the strong voice of the United Nations — at the highest levels — to raise specific attacks and threats in statements and regular briefings. For that, we need systematic reporting by United Nations missions on threats against women engaged in political and peace processes.

Finally, we need a renewed focus on resources. In that regard, we welcome the launch of the funding window under the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and the work done by UN-Women under the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): I would first like to commend Norway for organizing this timely event, as well as our briefers for their thorough interventions.

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to make some additional remarks.

Women's representation and leadership in peace processes can improve the prospects for the durability of peace agreements and also facilitates women's participation in the subsequent transitional political phases.

Still, gender-equal participation is often impeded by persisting obstacles, such as restrictive societal norms and attitudes.

In addition, relatively lower levels of education and multiple family and labour burdens, which women in conflict-affected areas often face, weaken their beneficial role in promoting sustainable peace and security. At the same time, conflict-related, gender-based and sexual violence directed against women because of their engagement in peace and security processes remains at an alarmingly high level.

Against that backdrop, there is an urgent need to create a safe and enabling environment in which women, especially local women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and civil society representatives, may carry out their work freely and without fear of any form of violence or intimidation.

That goal entails primarily taking holistic and coherent international policy action that is systematically mainstreamed by a gender perspective. In that vein, addressing impunity and ensuring the accountability of perpetrators of conflict-related, gender-based and sexual violence is crucial for the substantial protection of women participating in peace and security processes. An adequate international response should therefore include a human security approach that focuses on the specific challenges that women and girls experience and that aims at people-centred, prevention-oriented and gender-responsive solutions that are based on national ownership.

My country fully supports the coherent implementation of interlinked Security Council agendas and also prioritizes gender-equal representation, participation and leadership as a cross-cutting issue that guides its national policy, both domestic and foreign.

In implementing the national action plan on women and peace and security, Greece seeks to strengthen meaningful cooperation with all relevant stakeholders at all levels in order to advance the crucial role of women in peace processes.

As a final note, please allow me to reiterate Greece's determination to prevent and combat any form of gender-based violence as the only way to accelerate the realization of substantive gender equality and build peaceful, inclusive and gender-equal societies.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): I deliver these remarks on behalf of the Human Rights and Conflict Prevention Caucus, which is co-chaired by Germany and Switzerland, and its members Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Gabon, Guatemala, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Uruguay.

We thank Norway for organizing this important debate and the briefers for their precious contributions. We commend Norway — together with Albania, the Niger and the United Arab Emirates — for their shared commitments on women and peace and security, including a zero-tolerance approach to reprisals against briefers.

The Caucus recognizes the essential and meaningful contribution of women human rights defenders, women peacebuilders and gender equality advocates to defending and advancing peace and human rights across the globe. They provide the United Nations system in general and the Human Right Council and Security Council in particular with crucial insights for informed decision-making. Reprisals against them undermine the Security Council's work and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

We strongly condemn all threats, intimidations, violence and reprisals against any representatives of civil society, including while engaging with the United Nations. It is of the utmost importance to create a safe and enabling environment — online and offline — for women to lead and contribute in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, without fear of any kind of intimidation or violence.

We propose the following areas of action.

First, we urge all Member States to prevent and ensure adequate protection against any acts of intimidation and reprisals and to strengthen their response if they occur. We must engage in preventive measures and awareness-raising, as well as ensure accountability through robust investigations. We call for the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security, as well as all resolutions on human rights defenders and resolutions addressing intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the United Nations. We encourage the presentation by the Secretary-General of his annual report on reprisals to the General Assembly from its seventy-seventh session onward.

Secondly, the wider United Nations system has a duty to prevent and respond to alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals against those who provide information or seek to engage with it, and to ensure accountability when such acts occur. Coordination and collaboration among different bodies and mechanisms are crucial. The United Nations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and treaty bodies, should hold regular and systematic exchanges with civil society on identifying specific protection needs. We encourage the Peacebuilding Commission to make use of its advisory, bridging and convening roles in order to strengthen system-wide responses and preventive measures to that effect. We further commend the Secretary-General's focus on putting human rights and gender equality at the core of the United Nations work, as most recently expressed in *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982).

Thirdly, the Caucus calls upon the Security Council to publicly condemn intimidation, threats and reprisals against those who engage with it, in particular women. Civil society must be able to carry out its work independently and without interference. A resolute position by the Council on the need to create safe and enabling environments will send an important message: reprisals are unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. Such a clear stance will also help prevent the growing self-censorship by actors who decide not to engage with the United Nations out of fear.

Fourthly, the Caucus welcomes the work of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights as the focal point for reprisals within the United Nations system and will support her in that endeavour. The work of the focal point is underfunded, and we request all Member States to support it.

As a cross-regional group of Member States, the Caucus stands ready to work with all Member States, civil society and the entire United Nations system to protect the invaluable contribution of women to peace and security processes and to prevent them from becoming targets of all forms of violence and intimidation.

In my national capacity, let me add that Switzerland works for greater inclusion and protection for women and civil society in all our peacebuilding efforts and human rights policies. As this year's co-Chair of the Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network,

we will stand for women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Kayinamura (Rwanda): First of all, Madam President, allow me to wish you, your delegation and the members of the Security Council a Happy New Year 2022, which we hope will be a better one. We also thank you for this debate, as well as the briefers. We appreciate their contributions to this debate.

The past couple of decades have witnessed instability, violence, armed conflict and wars, which continue to affect women and girls disproportionately. From sexual violence to exploitation and abuse, women carry physical and psychological trauma over the years.

As has been said here in the Chamber, resolution 1325 (2000) places women's issues at the centre of the global conflict prevention in the context of international peace and security. While we have made considerable progress, the world continues to remain a very dangerous place for women and girls who find themselves caught up in unending conflict and wars. Rwanda believes that a greater effort is still needed to safeguard and protect the countless women who continue to suffer the everlasting consequences.

We also believe that our collective resolve to address those challenges should primarily focus on the implementation of existing commitments and frameworks, including addressing the root causes of conflict to eliminate the breeding ground for such crimes.

I wish to echo most of the speakers who spoke before me on various issues and recommendations to enhance the protection and promotion of women's rights around the word.

First, as States Members of the United Nations, we must renew our commitment to promoting and protecting women's rights in many aspects. This debate's theme brings forward vital elements that have been a component of discussions either here in the Council or in other United Nations forums. However, recent reports of the Secretary-General on this matter suggest that, collectively, we are not making the progress envisaged. As Members States and within our respective contexts,

we need to reinforce our policies and legal framework regarding the protection of women in all aspects by translating commitments into concrete actions.

We have a guiding instrument at our disposal, namely, resolution 1325 (2000), one of the pillars of which is protection. Resolution 1325 (2000) addresses key issues that are critical to this debate: the disproportionate impact of violent conflict and war on women and girls and the crucial role that women should — and already do — play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. If respective Member States were to strengthen their commitments in the implementation of the resolution, the results would undoubtedly be positive.

As Member States, it is critical to mobilize efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence as a threat to international peace and security. United Nations and Member States should also capitalize on existing international and regional cooperation frameworks to promote the protection and rights of women peacebuilders, while driving universal aspirations for commitments and recommendations to be translated into local, national and regional action plans.

I wish to conclude by re-emphasizing that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes helps to minimize the chances of conflict and community confrontation. It provides a larger sense of security to local populations, including women and children. Therefore, the protection of women should be part of the inclusive process of developing a policy framework seeking to provide equal rights and opportunities.

Lastly, Rwanda remains determined to carry forward our ambitious domestic agenda for women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming, which my Government has made a top priority. We will continue to engage constructively with the international community in that regard.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Security Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.