

Ms. Fata (Holy See): The Holy See thanks the French presidency for convening this important open debate.

The adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) represented and continues to represent an important step in ensuring that women play their rightful role and have their voices heard in the areas of peace and security. While many positive steps have been taken to implement the eight Council resolutions on women and peace and security, women remain a small minority in peace and security mediation efforts and in peacebuilding operations. This open debate should serve to highlight that fact and find new ways to advance the implementation of the Council resolutions on the subject.

The experience of the Catholic Church in conflict prevention and resolution, peacemaking and peacebuilding at the grassroots level during the more than five decades of violent conflict in Colombia and today in the implementation of the peace accord on the ground has amply demonstrated that women have been, and are, key peacemakers. They disarm the violent with their multiple capacities to comprehend and empathize, dissuade, convince and forgive and rebuild lives, families and entire communities. Pastora Mira Garcia, who lost her father, husband and two children during the civil war, is an icon for women peacemakers. She represented and spoke for all the victims in Colombia's 52-year armed conflict during the meeting on 8 September with Pope Francis and the victims of the conflict in Villavicencio. She teaches us that forgiveness is the balm of healing.

Sadly, however, most of today's conflicts show that women are all too often targets and victims, rather than peacemakers and peacebuilders. Women and girls suffer the impact of violent conflicts disproportionately. The most heinous aspect of such violence is the fact that they are specifically targeted as objects of violence and abuse, as a strategy of war. They are treated as pawns of war, rather than instruments of peace. Violent extremists and terrorists have used, and continue to use, sexual violence as a terror tactic. Acts of violence against women and girls are perpetuated not only in conflict situations. Women and girls also constitute, for instance, the great majority of the victims of trafficking in persons.

The States Members of the United Nations have a fundamental responsibility to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including those related to sexual violence against women and girls. Parties to conflict should respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Access to education in crisis situations is vital for the empowerment of women and girls. Through its institutions and agencies around the world, the Catholic Church provides assistance and support, education and skills training to thousands of women and girls who are the survivors of sexual violence in conflict situations. The courageous men and women who run those institutions sacrifice themselves daily, and many of them have paid dearly for their endeavours. Locally rooted, those institutions are able to respond rapidly and effectively so as to address on the ground the consequences of violence in armed conflict. Internationally

networked, they are active advocates in national and international forums, where policies are shaped and decisions are taken.

The Holy See and the Catholic Church will continue to engage women in their efforts aimed at conflict prevention and resolution, peacemaking and peacebuilding in many parts of the world, not only as a matter of principle, but also because the lessons learned and best practices verified in those fields clearly show that women are, indeed, effective agents for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security for all.