

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): I commend the Spanish presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to acknowledge the contributions of the Executive Director of UN-Women and the other representatives.

Resolution 1325 (2000) was a landmark resolution that rightly focused on the differing impact of armed conflict on women and girls and their exclusion from conflict prevention, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. There is undoubtedly an inextricable link between gender inequality and international peace and security.

Sri Lanka has emerged from a 30-year conflict that left deep-seated scars in our society and torn apart the socioeconomic fabric of our nation. Women were major victims of that conflict. A new President and Government were elected in January, committed to democratic values and to Sri Lanka moving forward as an engaged member of the international community. We have already begun taking steps aimed at achieving meaningful reconciliation, strengthening democratic institutions, good governance, the rule of law and confidence-building among communities affected by conflict for many years. We have renewed our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Historically, Sri Lanka has made strides in the area of women's empowerment. Universal adult franchise was introduced in Sri Lanka in 1931. Free education for both boys and girls and free health care were introduced very early after independence in 1948. Sri Lanka adopted a women's charter two years before the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. And we have in place a national action plan on women, which is currently being updated.

Yet we know that more remains to be done. Sri Lanka takes very seriously and as a matter of urgent priority the responsibility of ensuring the promotion and protection of the rights of women, including with regard to conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Sri Lanka's new Government has demonstrated the political will not merely to make international commitment statements, but also to make time-bound national commitments with a view to their speedy and effective implementation.

We are aware that the long drawn-out conflict has resulted in a large number of victims — orphans, war widows, single mothers and female-headed households. We are committed to addressing their immediate concerns and making them participants in all areas of peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Successful peacebuilding requires gender equality and women's empowerment, security, human rights and development to mesh together. Financial stability is also an important factor in that regard.

It is also vital that we engage domestic actors from the grass roots to the highest echelons of Government to ensure ownership of the peacebuilding processes and to guarantee

long-term sustainability. In all those endeavours, we are committed to including women as essential participants in the conversation. That can be done only by acknowledging the existence of structural institutionalized gender bias, identifying the problems and sincerely seeking solutions.

For over five decades, Sri Lanka has been making modest contributions to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Sri Lanka acknowledges the importance of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. We are committed to purposefully including women at all levels of those processes, including at the decision-making and policymaking stages. We are equally committed to including our highly trained and disciplined female forces in peacekeeping efforts.

We welcome the formal launch today of the publication of the global study on women and peace and security. We congratulate the contributors and experts and the lead author, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. We will closely review the recommendations in the global study to further the shared goal of women remaining at the centre of the peace process.

I wish to assure the Council that as we proceed with our reconciliation and peacebuilding process with the active participation of women at all levels, we will continue to share our experiences and best practices, especially in relation to the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.