

Mr. Lal (India): We thank the delegation of France for convening this open debate. We also thank all the briefers for sharing updates on the ongoing efforts and the emerging trends regarding this agenda item.

The situations of armed conflict directly addressed by the Security Council over the past two decades have primarily been intra-State conflicts. Such internal armed conflict situations are often a result of a breakdown in the capacity of the State to enforce the rule of law and maintain effective governance. These conflicts also involve non-State actors and terrorist networks destroying the social fabric. In many of these conflicts the world has, regrettably, seen extreme brutality being inflicted upon women and sexual violence being used as a tool. At the same time, the importance of women's empowerment and their participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and governance for sustaining peace is also becoming better understood.

Despite the increased focus on the links between women, peace and security, and the evolving normative framework during the past decade and a half, non-combatant women and girls continue to be major victims during armed conflicts. The heinous crimes against humanity perpetrated by terror networks such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in West Asia, Boko Haram in parts of West Africa or Al-Shabaab in East Africa, especially against women and girls, are stark reminders of the serious challenges that need to be overcome

Increased institutionalized involvement by women in peacekeeping, conflict prevention and resolution and political processes is important to address this challenge. That requires capacity- and institution-building at the ground level. Therefore, the issue of women, peace and security must be seen in the wider societal context of women's empowerment and longer-term sustainable development.

At the United Nations, the work done by the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other entities continues to push a gender empowerment agenda that can have a transformative impact on societies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the interlinkage between sustainable development and peace and security. Also at the United Nations, while there is recognition of the need for greater participation of women in peacekeeping operations, progress remains slow.

In the specific context of United Nations peacekeeping, India has been the lead troop contributor over the past seven decades. While there has been only a marginal increase in the overall number of women peacekeepers, almost a decade ago, in 2007, India deployed the first-ever all-women formed police unit for peacekeeping with the United Nations Mission in Liberia. Prime Minister Modi has committed to a higher representation of Indian female peacekeepers in missions. India has committed to fulfilling the pledge to have women serve in 15 per cent of military observer positions by the end of this year. India has also committed to provide another all-female formed police unit.

Moreover, India has taken the lead in hosting specialized training courses for peacekeepers on sexual violence in armed conflict situations. Among other issues, those courses have focused on the role of women in the context of post-conflict situations. Earlier this year, India hosted the third such specialized course for female military officers, which was organized by the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in New Delhi, in partnership with UN-Women. India, the first country to contribute to the Secretary-General's trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, has continued to contribute to this cause this year.

Prosecution is essential for prevention. The international community has an important role in helping build adequate resources and capacities in that regard. In that context, earlier this year, India contributed to the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Special Court was among the landmark tribunals that tried and convicted persons for crimes that included the use of child soldiers and forced marriages.

Several key decision-making positions in India are held by distinguished women. They include the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament and many ministers. More than 1.3 million elected women representatives at the local Government level across India are involved in formulating and implementing gender-sensitive public policies. In international forums, too, India assigns high importance to the role of women. In 1953, the first woman President of the General Assembly was from India.

India remains ready to contribute further internationally, both to the normative and practical aspects, on issues relating to the women and peace and security agenda.