

Ms. Viotti: I thank the French presidency for highlighting the importance of the women and peace and security agenda. Let me start by expressing appreciation to the Security Council for its recent efforts to bring women's voices into the centre of its work.

Earlier this month, the Council heard the moving account of Joy Bishara, one of the young women kidnapped in Chibok by Boko Haram. Such testimony helps to deepen our understanding of the challenge. It also underscores the pressing need for more concerted and tangible action. In that spirit, today I will focus largely on prevention — a core pillar of the women and peace and security agenda and a key priority of the Secretary-General.

The links between prevention and gender equality are many and clear. Women are affected in distinct and distinctly negative ways by armed conflict and violence. Just as gender discrimination is a constant in peacetime, so it prevails when society collapses into war, with devastating impact. Women are the overwhelming majority of victims of rape used as a weapon of war, as well as of abductions and human trafficking. In urban warfare, they are at particular risk during house searches and at checkpoints. The lower women's status is in terms of health, wealth and education, the greater is their exposure to harm. Their underrepresentation in the justice and security sectors and in the upper echelons of political power likewise increases their exposure to harm. In turn, this extreme political marginalization undermines the potential of women as actors for conflict prevention — a vital role that the Security Council has emphasized repeatedly, including in resolution 2242 (2015) and the twin resolutions on sustaining peace (Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262).

When the Council visited the Lake Chad basin earlier this year, local leaders all raised women's empowerment and its relationship with birth rates — which are among the highest in the world — in their discussions about root causes and solutions to the current crisis. When four senior leaders of the United Nations and the African Union, led by the Deputy Secretary-General, visited Nigeria together in the first high-level mission of its kind focused entirely on women and peace and security, they found that in spite of the presence of strong networks of women peacebuilders and activists, the views of women were underrepresented both in the military and in the humanitarian response. Recently, the Group of Women Facilitators in Guinea-Bissau — a network of civil society leaders — came together to defuse a potentially explosive political impasse and to open a communications channel between two main political leaders that had been closed for two years.

Indeed, there are countless women-led prevention initiatives that are either insufficiently supported or disconnected from national or regional early-warning mechanisms or decision-making bodies in general. The Secretary-General is strongly committed to promoting gender equality in the work of the United Nations for peace and security, and to fully integrating conflict gender analysis into that work. His Executive Office includes a Senior Adviser in policy at the level of Under-Secretary-General, with twin mandates on prevention and gender, who is working to ensure the linkages between the two. The Secretary-General's current visit to the Central African Republic aims not only to support the operation at this fragile moment, but also

to witness first-hand how the new approach to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse is translating into changes on the ground.

The Secretary-General has also put forward a concrete plan to achieve gender parity across the United Nations. In this regard, we are farthest behind in our peace operations in crisis countries, where the role of women is often needed most. We are working with troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the number of female uniformed personnel. It is simply unacceptable that in 2017 only 3 per cent of our peacekeepers — the most visible face of the United Nations — are women.

We are also striving to increase the pool of women mediators. The recently established High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation is both high-level and gender-balanced. The new Office of Counter-Terrorism is integrating a gender perspective into its efforts to address this threat and prevent violent extremism, and proposals for the reform of the Secretariat's peace and security architecture must include a strong emphasis on strengthening the link between political strategies and gender expertise. Looking ahead, our efforts to strengthen the United Nations capacity for effective prevention will also include the following.

First, we will engage more systematically with women's organizations on the ground as natural partners for prevention.

Secondly, we will ensure that our prevention initiatives and monitoring include a focus on women's rights violations, including violence against women and girls, anti-women rhetoric, increased levels of militarization, shifts in the political marginalization of women or women's groups and strict enforcement of traditional gender norms, dress codes, segregation of the sexes or other steps that may not adhere to international human rights standards.

Thirdly, we will tackle the structural and root causes of crisis, including gender inequality.

Fourthly, we will strengthen the collection and analysis of gender statistics and encourage Member States to monitor gender-quality indicators as part of their work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Gender equality and the security of women are among the most reliable indicators of peace.

Fifthly, 17 years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), our own implementation too often remains ad hoc. While there is clear recognition of the relationship between gender equality, women's participation and stability and resilience, too little is being done to operationalize that understanding. Starting next year, the Secretary-General's annual report on this issue will focus more on results and less on our own activities. I invite all participants to share their evidence, examples and impacts. Let us use this opportunity to examine gaps and build on successes.

Implementing that vision will depend upon deepening our partnership with Member States, regional organizations and civil society. We look forward to working with participants based on

their shared conviction that women's meaningful participation makes our peace efforts stronger and more sustainable