

**Ms. Mehdiyeva (Azerbaijan):** At the outset, I would like to commend the French presidency for holding this important open debate on women and peace and security. We also thank the briefers for their statements.

The women and peace and security agenda has gained significant momentum since resolution 1325 (2000) was adopted. As such, the Security Council has paid increasing attention to the issue by acknowledging that combating impunity, addressing past violations and asserting the principles of the rule of law underpin efforts to build peace and stability. Among other areas, it is important to continue paying close attention to the gender consequences of the breakdown of the rule of law during and after conflict.

While genuine strides have been made in strengthening the political will and international legal framework needed to secure justice and deal with conflict-related sexual violence, there is still a need for greater focus on the full range of violations and serious crimes experienced by women, including such matters as forced disappearances, foreign occupation, mass forced displacements and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. There must be no tolerance for such acts. Combating impunity and strengthening the responses of both international and national justice are critically important in that regard.

Against that backdrop, it is curious that the representative of Armenia — the country that bears primary responsibility for unleashing the war and perpetrating the aggression against Azerbaijan and has been carrying out ethnic cleansing on a massive scale and committing other serious crimes during the conflict, including against women and children — should take the floor in the Security Council, and attempt to lecture others and voice groundless accusations against my country.

Suffice it to say that the attack and capture of the town Khojaly in the Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in February 1992 involved the brutal killing of hundreds of Azerbaijanis, including 83 children and 106 women. Thousands of civilians were wounded and taken hostage, and many remain missing. The town was razed to the ground, and the level of brutality in Khojaly was indeed shocking. Atrocities included scalping, beheading, the bayoneting of pregnant women and mutilation of bodies. Seventy-eight of the mutilated were minors. Six families were exterminated. Twentyfive children lost both parents, and 130 children lost one parent. The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the crimes committed in the course of the Armenian aggression not only impedes progress in achieving the long-awaited peace and reconciliation process, but also aggravates the situation on the ground.

In April of last year, the armed forces of Armenia stepped up their firing from their positions in the occupied territories, thereby subjecting the armed forces of Azerbaijan along the line of contact and the adjacent densely populated areas under the control of Azerbaijan to intense fire with heavy artillery and large-calibre weapons. As a result, 34 towns and villages in Azerbaijan were shelled, causing casualties among civilians, as well as destroying or substantially damaging private and public property, including residences, schools and kindergartens.

Armenia should therefore be the last to comment on such notions as women and peace and security and human rights. Azerbaijan will continue its efforts to eliminate the consequences of the Armenian aggression, with a view to achieving a political settlement of the conflict based on international law and ensuring peace and justice in the region.