

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*) I thank the President for organizing this open debate.

Belgium associates itself fully with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like to deliver the following remarks in my national capacity.

In July, we adopted our third national action plan regarding women and peace and security. The new plan, which covers the period of 2017 to 2021, encompasses numerous courses of action that should contribute to improving the status of women in areas of conflict, pre-conflict and post-conflict. Ensuring the implementation of such an ambitious plan during this period requires necessary follow-up. To that end, frequent consultations among the Belgian departments concerned, as well as with external actors, including civil society and local women's organizations, is critical. An annual report regarding progress achieved will be submitted to Parliament.

Incorporating the gender perspective in peace and security initiatives is among the pillars of our policy. In that regard, concrete initiatives include promoting the incorporation of the gender perspective at the Peacebuilding Commission in developing new integrated peacebuilding strategies as well as in the semi-annual reviews of strategic frameworks. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, we are pleased that the Commission now has at its disposal a mechanism that can better incorporate the women peace and security agenda, thanks to gender-based focal points.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2017/861) rightly mentions the importance of improving technical capacity-building in the area of gender equality as a key strategy for incorporating and bolstering gender equality in conflict prevention initiatives being carried out by the United Nations. This technical competency is also of great importance in peacekeeping operations — and all the more crucial when mandates are revised, contingent levels are reduced or when the financing of peacekeeping operations diminishes. In the event, it is critical that gender adviser posts not be affected.

A number of studies reflect the fact that women's participation heightens the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, the credibility and quality of peacekeeping, as well as heightening the speed of economic recovery in post-conflict situations and the sustainability of peace agreements. The role of women — for example, in security sector reform — is often underestimated. A greater presence of women within reformed, mixed security forces strengthens the link between the State and citizens. It contributes to a more peaceful relationship between security forces and civilians, with the view to a lasting end to a crisis.

Women are a force for peace, and it is therefore critical for women to be able to fully play their role as political actors in the service of peace and conflict prevention. Belgium seeks to contribute to this empowerment of women, including in the realm of mediation. In that regard,

here in new York next April, we will convene a seminar on the role of women in mediation in Africa, so as to identify ways so to strengthen their involvement.

To conclude, I would like to note that, as a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council, Belgium expects and hopes to continue to actively engage in the women and peace and security agenda.