

**Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran):** I would like to express my gratitude to France for organizing today's debate, and thank the briefers.

The growing body of evidence shows that women's participation in peace and reconciliation processes and their implementation have contributed to increased chances of success for the sustainability of peace and security arrangements in various parts of the world. As a result of foreign intervention and military invasions, as well as foreign occupation combined with an upsurge of violent extremism and terrorism, women and girls in many parts of the Middle East are witnessing the collapse of their hopes for a better future. At the same time, sadly in many conflicts, especially in the Middle East, women have been and continue to be the primary victims of large-scale and often systemic sexual violence.

Acts committed by terrorist groups, particularly Boko Haram, Da'esh and Al-Shabaab, demonstrate the most extreme forms of such violence, which particularly targets women and children. There are thousands of confirmed cases in which sexual violence has been used as a tactic of terrorism and employed by terrorist groups in places, such as Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Nigeria and Mali, to advance their military, economic and ideological ends.

It would be naive to assume that, based on the physical disappearance of Da'esh in Iraq and Syria, its heinous activities and atrocities directed against innocent civilians, especially women and children, might cease. Indeed, they have integrated those dreadful practices into their takfiri ideology — a destructive ideology of hate and exclusion enforced through a complex system of networking throughout the world. The international community needs first and foremost to concentrate on combating such a vicious ideology and those who propagate it.

At the same time, we cannot neglect the very significant dynamic generated by interventionist policies and occupation, as well as attempts at regime change that have prepared the optimal breeding ground for terrorist and extremist groups to grow and function. Experience in our region clearly shows that, following every instance of aggression and foreign intervention, there is a vacuum resulting in instability, which is effectively exploited by those groups that have committed the most serious crimes against innocent civilians, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable part of the fabric of society. A failedState situation and post-aggression environment give them a free hand to organize themselves and propagate their ideology. Unfortunately, the Security Council normally does not discuss the role of those who bear the primary responsibility for such scenarios by having created the breeding ground for terrorists. For obvious reasons, it prefers to discuss the symptoms and not the causes.

Iranian women are an integral part of a vibrant Iranian society. Their outstanding role in advancing development, peace and humanitarian causes in society is incontestable. They are active participants in political life and elections as both candidates and voters. Education has been the centrepiece of our efforts to empower women and girls over the past four decades. It is therefore not surprising that the number of women who study medicine and science in Iran is

now double that of men. The role of the private sector, including microenterprise and cooperatives for women's economic empowerment, has increased substantively in Iran.

It noteworthy that our national achievements are being made against the backdrop of the most hostile, unilateral and coercive sanctions against Iranians. Such inhuman and indiscriminate sanctions imposed by the United States under dubious pretexts are in flagrant violation of the basic economic and social rights of all women and girls, as well as their right to development, and undermines the constructive role that Iranian civil society and women can play therein.

I hope that this open debate will contribute to ongoing efforts to integrate the women and peace and security agenda into conflict prevention.