

Ms. Plepytė (Lithuania): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of Estonia, Latvia and my own country, Lithuania. Our delegations also align themselves with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union. At the outset, we commend the French delegation for convening this open debate. We also thank the briefers for their remarks and steadfast commitment to this important issue.

The empowerment of women, their inclusive engagement, the promotion of gender equality and the mainstreaming of human rights are fundamental for sustaining peace. We commend the Secretary-General for his dedication to further advancing the women and peace and security agenda. Keeping in mind the broad scope and cross-cutting nature of that agenda, allow me to focus on priority aspects for the Baltic countries.

The critical role of women in negotiating, peacekeeping and peacebuilding is often overlooked. The Baltic countries emphasize the need for the full and effective participation of women at all stages and all levels of conflict prevention and resolution as well as peacebuilding. However, 17 years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), far too few women around the world act as mediators or are engaged in a decision-making. It is not only a question of equality. Peace negotiations and agreements set the structure and direction for post-conflict reconstruction and overall policies that affect the lives of all women and society as a whole.

We strongly advocate for the gender perspective to be fully integrated into all aspects of peace operations. Increased numbers of women peacekeepers and the deployment of women's protection and gender advisers, as well as human rights and gender-awareness training, have all proven successful and should be further expanded. In the course of this past year, the Baltic countries significantly stepped up their contribution to United Nations peace operations. We are striving to deploy more gender-balanced peacekeeping troops, and we continuously encourage female military and police personnel to apply.

Training is crucial to raising awareness and improving the implementation of gender aspects in peace operations. Before their deployment, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian peacekeepers undergo high quality training on human rights and gender-related issues, including the eradication of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. That training has moved well beyond abstract concepts towards more hands-on, scenario-based learning, to which those working on the ground can relate

.In that regard, the Baltic countries strongly support the Secretary's-General efforts to bring sexual exploitation to an end. Therefore, we signed the Secretary-General's voluntary compact on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Presidents of Estonia and Lithuania have joined the Circle of Leadership on the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations.

The scale and complexity of the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda requires coherent and comprehensive efforts. The central role of civil society, including women's

organizations, should be fully recognized. We are pleased that women civil society representatives now regularly brief the Security Council during country-specific meetings. That useful practice should be continued.

Last but not least, a gender-responsive legal and judicial system constitutes, as is emphasized in the Secretary's-General report (S/2017/861), one of the building blocks of a resilient society. However, access to justice still faces structural inequalities. In the absence of credible judicial and security systems, the perpetrators of crimes against women and girls will pursue their malfeasance. The Baltic countries remain committed to securing accountability for sexual and gender-based violence through national and international mechanisms. It is equally important to ensure that victims receive genuine compensation for the harm they have suffered. In that regard, the International Criminal Court continues to be an important mechanism for combating sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, and should be used vigorously to pursue accountability.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that gender equality and resilience to conflicts and their prevention are closely interlinked. We therefore fully support the Secretary-General's profound commitment to shifting the focus of all United Nations activities towards a holistic approach to prevention, including through the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda.