

Mr. Meszaros: Empowering women is not only the right thing to do, but we know that it also leads to more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. It is essential for conflict prevention and it makes peace more sustainable. That is why NATO supports empowering women within our own organization, the armed forces, civilian structures and societies of allies and partners. NATO's current action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions have been endorsed not only by the 29 NATO allies, but by a total of 55 nations in all, bringing together the largest political coalition to implement the women and peace and security agenda. NATO aims to maintain that momentum and level of support in 2018, with revised versions of both our policy for implementing resolution 1325 (2000) and our action plan. Much has already been achieved. NATO's military commands and missions have established a network of gender advisers, and the implementation of the action plan is supported at headquarters level by a network of gender focal points. Military guidelines on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence are being implemented by our strategic commands, and NATO will review progress in 2018 in concert with other international organizations, including the United Nations.

NATO recently updated and approved a strategic command-level directive on gender that includes standards of behaviour and a code of conduct to be upheld by our personnel and NATO-led forces. We are funding research on the role of gender in countering violent extremism, and we have initiated a structured dialogue with civil society through the civil society advisory panel, which held its second meeting in early October in order to contribute to the upcoming revision of our policy for implementing resolution 1325 (2000) and action plan.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done. On the key question of participation, we have seen only a small increase in female representation in the armed forces of member States — an average of 10.9 per cent in 2016, compared to 10.8 per cent in 2015. The average percentage of women in NATO operations for NATO allies was 6.8 per cent in 2016, compared to 6.4 per cent in 2015. We understand that we need to improve those figures, and urge our member States to do their part.

On the leadership side, women hold only 21 per cent of the NATO civilian staff leadership positions. Over the past year we have seen the departure of two out of three of our female four-star officers. Again, we urge NATO member States to play their part to redress the imbalance.

Our work on revising our policy and action plan for 2018 will enable us to highlight the importance of integrating gender perspectives in all our tasks and at all levels. Gender is not only a perspective; it is a tool that contributes and adds value to all of NATO's objectives and core tasks, and it is fundamental to ensuring peace and security for all.