

Ms. Shuurman:

Gender equality is not optional. It is essential. Why? Because it allows us to respond better and smarter to the many complex security challenges that we face today. Gender equality is about our credibility and our capability. It is about the resilience of our societies, the readiness of our forces and the effectiveness of our operations. That is what NATO has learned from more than a decade and a half of implementing resolution 1325 (2000).

At its Summit in July, NATO endorsed a new action plan on the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, and 55 allies and partner nations associated themselves with the plan. We now host what could well be the largest global coalition on implementing resolution 1325 (2000). We continue to build our coalition inside and out. Last week, NATO broke new ground when we hosted our first ever civil society advisory panel. This is about cementing our dialogue — the dialogue between NATO and those representatives of civil society who work on conflict prevention and resolution and women's empowerment. If peace is to be sustainable, we must be inclusive.

We still have a long way to go, but NATO is doing a great deal, and we keep things as practical as possible. We continue to learn from our operations, missions, training and exercises. Gender perspectives are now at the centre of NATO defence planning and reporting processes. NATO supports the implementation of resolution 2242 (2015) by financing research on the role of gender in countering violent extremism. NATO strategic commands are now implementing the military guidelines on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. Sexual violence scars families, rips societies apart and slows down peacekeeping and conflict resolution processes. It affects the success of NATO missions. We cannot be bystanders. We need to look at ourselves, too, by raising awareness of NATO codes of conduct and other tools designed to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

We can do better, however. Just 10 per cent of NATO armed forces are women; of those deployed in operations, it is just 5.5 per cent. We understand that improving this ratio will improve effectiveness, and we urge Member States to do their part. We support the United Nations pledge in London to double the proportion of women in United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Again, we need to lead by example. The gender balance in the NATO leadership is now improving, after years of stagnation. Last week, we proudly welcomed the first female NATO Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Rose Gottemoeller. In June, our first female four-star, American Admiral Michelle Howard, assumed command of the NATO Joint Force Command, Naples. The NATO Defence College in Rome will be led by a woman, too — Canadian Lieutenant-General Christine Whitecross. We know that we need to keep up this momentum, and we will, because equal participation is not a favour to women. It is a hard-core security requirement. It is essential to the resilience of our societies, to the effectiveness of our forces and to a modern, ready and responsive Alliance. But above all, it is fundamental to achieving lasting peace.