

Ms. Radwan (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank France for convening this important open debate on women and peace and security.

I also thank Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti for her valuable briefing, and the other briefers for their important comments and remarks.

We celebrate today the seventeenth anniversary of the adoption of the women and peace and security agenda, which has become an important pillar in conflict prevention and resolution, humanitarian action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite the international consensus on the vital role of women in peace, security, human rights and development, States and organizations still have a long way to go in order to achieve these goals. We therefore need to redouble our efforts to address the root causes of the challenges that confront women and undermine their rights. In this regard, and in the interests of time, I would like to focus on three main challenges.

First, occupation represents one of the main obstacles to women's advancement and is the most heinous violation of rights, freedoms and international norms. Every day, Palestinian and Arab women suffer under the Israeli occupation, which commits all forms of violence, including sexual violence, arbitrary detention, physical and psychological torture, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Secondly, we note the increasing violence in conflict zones and the growing threat posed by non-State actors, sectarian militias and terrorist groups. Atrocities are being committed on a daily basis against civilians, women in particular, by the Syrian regime, Iranian sectarian militias, the terrorist Hizbullah militia, Houthi militias, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia and elsewhere.

Thirdly, we see the spread of violent extremist discourse against Muslims and Islam, including women. Women are oppressed even in countries that call for democracy and religious and personal freedoms. These countries enact laws that limit the freedom of women, including their religious freedom, and prevent them from participating in public life merely because of the way they look. All of these practices run counter to our goal of empowering women and respecting their religious and ideological freedom. All of these challenges adversely affect economic and social development and undermine the well-being and prosperity of women and society.

In order to address these challenges, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls on the Security Council and other United Nations entities overseeing the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda to confront these challenges comprehensively and consistently, end occupation and colonization, and refrain from supporting oppressive sectarian regimes and sectarian militias. We should all combat extremist discourse against Islam and Muslims and ensure the comprehensive development of all nations. Most importantly, we should seek to ensure the active participation of women in all of these efforts and refrain from controlling their religious and cultural choices.

The advancement of women has been a priority for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We are focused on women's education at all levels, which helps to ensure their access to the private and public sectors. Women in Saudi Arabia have proven themselves. They have been able to become members of the Shura Council and have participated in municipal elections as candidates and voters. They have become diplomats and occupy a number of leadership positions. Women have also been a focus of our development efforts, including the 2030 Vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which the Kingdom launched in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The achievements of Saudi women have been many, and I cannot enumerate them all. They have made great inroads in the fields of science, technology, medicine, business, humanitarian action, pilgrim services and other scientific, social and economic activities. All of these achievements are the results of our arduous efforts and of the attention we accord to women's empowerment.

I note that this success has not happened in a vacuum. Women have played a pioneering role in Muslim and Arab history. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is making great strides in order to ensure the advancement of women and their empowerment, based on our belief that addressing the root causes of women's exclusion and marginalization is our religious, national and development duty.

Thanks to the courageous and wise leadership of my country, women in Saudi Arabia are allowed to dream. We promise that the next stage will allow women to take part in all walks of life. This is based on the principles of moderate Islam, which has given women the status they deserve and guarantees their dignity and rights, far removed from extremist discourse that has nothing to do with our principles or our way of life.

Our achievements are many, but we still have a long way to go. Saudi women have been a model of patience, dedication and devotion. Today, women in Saudi Arabia are allowed to dream and to lead in favour of peace, security and well-being, not only in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the region but also throughout the world. These are not empty promises. They are part of an action plan that my country has launched and is determined to see through to the end.