

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): I thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their remarks and to acknowledge the contributions by the Executive Director of UN-Women and other representatives.

As we mark the seventeenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), it presents an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and challenges in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. The issues of the different impact that armed conflict has on women and girls and their exclusion from conflict prevention, peacebuilding and peacekeeping continue to be critical aspects of the work that we still have ahead of us in that regard, at both the international and domestic levels.

There is undoubtedly an indissoluble link between gender inequality and international peace and security. Indeed, finding ways to increase women's inclusion in peacekeeping and end the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation have been two of the most challenging aspects of the women and peace and security agenda. Despite several Council resolutions, including resolution 2106 (2013), which encouraged troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the number of women recruited and deployed in peace operations, and resolution 2272 (2016), of March 2016, which explicitly tackled sexual exploitation and abuse, a holistic transformative culture remains largely absent. In that regard, we are pleased to announce that Sri Lanka has taken the initiative — together with the participation of the Permanent Mission of Canada, the International Civil Society Action Network and the Association of War Affected Women — to co-host a side event at the United Nations on 31 October on ending sexual exploitation and abuse and increasing the numbers of women in peacekeeping, in order to mark the seventeenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). We invite everyone here to attend this interactive discussion so that we can raise greater awareness and work together to better serve our communities.

Sri Lanka has demonstrated its wholehearted commitment to the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse. We were one of the first countries to sign the Secretary-General's voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. Our President, His Excellency Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, has joined the Secretary-General's Circle of Leadership on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, and we have made contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Historically, Sri Lanka has made strides in the area of women's empowerment. We adopted a women's charter two years before the Beijing Platform for Action, and we already have in place a national plan of action on women. But we know that more remains to be done. Sri Lanka takes the responsibility of promoting and protecting the rights of women very seriously, including preventing conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse as an urgent priority.

Sri Lanka's long-drawn-out conflict has resulted in a large number of victims, including orphans, war widows, single mothers and female-headed households. We are committed to addressing their immediate concerns and making them participants in all areas of peacebuilding and peacekeeping. This will continue to be a priority in our post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

Successful peacebuilding means working to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment — including economic empowerment, human security, human rights and development — mesh together. It is also vital that we engage domestic actors, from the grassroots to the highest echelons of Government, in ensuring ownership of peacebuilding processes and guaranteeing long-term sustainability. In all those endeavours, we are committed to including women as essential participants in the conversation. In a reflection of Sri Lanka's commitments, and as we tread the path of reconciliation and transformative justice, my Government has appointed an 11-member task force of eminent persons to hold nationwide consultations on reconciliation measures. The members of the task force are entirely drawn from civil society and include six women. However, all this can be done only by acknowledging the existence of institutionalized structural gender bias, identifying the associated problems and sincerely seeking solutions to them.

Sri Lanka has been making modest contributions to United Nations peacekeeping efforts for more than five decades. We are equally committed to including our highly trained and disciplined women forces in our peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, as Sri Lanka proceeds in its reconciliation and peacebuilding process, with the active participation of women at all levels, we will continue to share our experiences and practices, especially in relation to the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.