

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom):

As the penholder on women and peace and security, I want first to welcome all of our numerous guests today and to thank the Secretary-General and Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka for their briefings and all the work they do on this agenda.

I also want to pay tribute to Rita Lopidia for her briefing. Sha has given us a valuable insight into what “women and peace and security” really means on the ground in South Sudan. I commend the work that she and others like her are doing to turn the words “peace” and “security” into a reality. I also want to welcome the fact that Russia, in organizing this debate, has accepted the importance both of the women and peace and security agenda and of the role of civil society on this and, I hope, on other issues. Talking of civil society, I want to pick up one of Rita’s points and assure her that the United Kingdom will invite civil society to brief in country-specific meetings under our presidency in March, and I call on other presidencies to do the same.

More broadly, it is not enough to support the women and peace and security agenda today, one day a year. Words spoken in this Chamber are not enough. Commitment means action every day throughout the year in mandate renewals and other negotiations, here and in capitals. And sadly, the reality at the moment is that women and girls continue to be affected inordinately by conflict and insecurity in Syria, in South Sudan and in so many other places. And to compound the injustice, while women’s lives are on the line, their voices are seldom heard in the pursuit of peace. We need only look at the gender balance of the Council.

And yet, in this very Chamber a year ago, we all committed to doing something about it — to take the words of resolution 2242 (2015), which I was proud to draft with Román, and turn them into something meaningful, something real. We have had a year — a year to increase the effective participation of women in peace processes; a year to increase women’s roles in the military and peacekeeping; a year to increase the finance to support all this work and more. So how have we got on? Well, let me take those three points — participation, peacekeeping and money — in turn.

On the first, over the past year the United Kingdom has been pushing to get women a seat at the negotiating table, and not just because it is the right thing to do. We are doing so because it works. As the Secretary-General and Samantha reminded us, when women are at the table the chances of peace increase by 20 to 35 per cent. And yet less than one in ten negotiators is a woman. In Yemen, United Kingdom support has enabled the United Nations Special Envoy to employ an expert on women’s political participation. It has enabled a UN-Women project to boost the influence of Yemeni women in the peace process. And in Syria, we have worked hard to ensure that women’s views are heard, including through support for the Women’s Advisory Board and the Women’s Consultative Committee that Carolyn rightly mentioned.

Some would say that this counts for very little when the bombs still fall — that these are just token gestures. But as many of my colleagues have done, let us look at Colombia. The guns have fallen silent. The negotiations included a gender subcommission. Three delegations of women’s organizations held talks with the negotiating team in Havana. Those are not token gestures. They are meaningful steps towards bringing a sustainable end to more than 50 years of war, and I am proud of the diplomatic and financial support from the United Kingdom that has helped to make that happen.

Secondly, however, we must match those steps at the negotiating table in United Nations peacekeeping missions and our own militaries. Women have as much of a

role to play in keeping the peace as in negotiating it. That is why the United Nations peacekeeping defence ministerial meeting, held in London last month, included such a strong focus on women and peace and security, as Siti reminded us earlier. More than 60 countries signed our ambitious communiqué, and we now need to deliver on it, doubling the number of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations by 2020, increasing the number of women in missions as a whole and tackling every single allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse until such horrific practices end. Our efforts should not stop at peacekeeping. The United Kingdom is updating the training that our armed forces receive so that everyone understands the agenda on women and peace and security and knows how to prevent sexual violence in conflict. And we will be doing the same for the troops we train from other countries, too.

Finally, an increase in our ambitions for women and peace and security should be matched by an increase in the financing underpinning it. That includes more support for the Global Acceleration Instrument for Women and Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (GAI), and for UN-Women and civil society. It means making our development spending gender-sensitive, something that the United Kingdom continually strives for. And in the most basic terms, it means increasing our spending on projects related to women and peace and security. The United Kingdom has increased its spending by more than 50 per cent, to \$10 million in this financial year, including \$1 million for the GAI, and I hope others will do the same.

But in conclusion, we need something more than money. We need leaders — leaders like Rita Lopidia. We did not choose a woman to be the next Secretary-General, but in António Guterres we have chosen a true champion of gender parity, and in appointing a gender-balanced transition team, he is already off to a good start. We look to him to continue that work when he begins in earnest, and to help to make the second anniversary of resolution 2242 (2015) an even greater success.