

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka: It is an honour to address the Security Council and to present the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/861) on women and peace and security. As mentioned by the Chef de Cabinet, the Secretary-General is currently in the Central African Republic. It is a pleasure to be accompanied today by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Navamane Ratna Patten, who was part of our recent solidarity mission with the Deputy-Secretary-General to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Together, we sought to enhance our joint support for the women and peace and security agenda in those countries.

The Secretary-General's report on women and peace and security celebrates progress and good practice and sets out his vision and recommendations. It also brings into the spotlight a number of alarming trends and setbacks. I am pleased to be here in the Chamber today with a Colombian activist who represents the many Colombian women who gave peace in their country a real chance. That is one example of the progress we have made. The United Nations has lauded their achievements and is following their lead, helping to implement a peace agreement with more than 100 provisions on gender equality. For example, the United Nations Mission in Colombia engages regularly with women's organizations and has a record percentage of women among its military observers — at 11 per cent, much higher than we have ever seen — with women representing 48 per cent of civilian staff.

Unfortunately, Colombia is an exception to the global practice, but one that we can follow. Although women's absence from peace tables is no longer easily brushed off as normal, it is still commonplace. Every year, we track women's overall participation in peace processes led by the United Nations, the inclusion of gender expertise and gender-sensitive provisions in peace agreements, and the requirement to consult with women's civil-society organizations. On all of those indicators, we performed slightly worse than a year ago.

At the Union of Myanmar peace conference in 2016, before the current crisis, there were seven women and 68 men among the delegates. Recent peace talks on the Central African Republic hosted by the Community of Sant'Egidio did not include a single woman. Six years into the Syrian civil war, and in spite of significant efforts by the United Nations, partners and the Special Envoy, women's participation in the peace talks is still inadequate and often limited to an advisory role.

That political marginalization extends beyond peace talks. Only 17 countries have an elected woman Head of State or Government. That includes only one post-conflict conflict, namely, Liberia, where the presidency of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf just ended after two terms that included democratic elections and the peaceful transfer of power. That is something to celebrate. The proportion of women parliamentarians in conflict and post-conflict countries has stagnated at 16 per cent in the past two years. The use of quotas and temporary special measures would help. In Somalia, for instance, representation jumped to nearly 25 per cent, as compared with 14 per cent in the previous elections. In local elections in Mali at the end of last year, women

represented 30 per cent of the elected candidates in Bamako, Gao and Timbuktu, four times higher than the previous result.

Atrocities against women and girls in armed conflict have never been more thoroughly documented than they are now. International and national war crimes courts, commissions of inquiry, comprehensive mappings of human rights violations and documentation efforts led by civil society, expert investigators and reporters pay much closer attention to sexual and gender-based violence than ever before. The international community has more than enough evidence of these crimes in Syria, South, the Sudan and Central African Republic. In some of those places we have amassed the most extensive documentation of sexual and gender-based violence in history. What we do not have are consequences for the perpetrators and justice, dignity, and support for the survivors. That impunity should not continue.

The international community is reaching hundreds of thousands of survivors with assistance and programmes, which did not exist one or two decades ago. But many more cannot be reached owing to lack of resources, access and security. Many organizations, including UN-Women, participate in those efforts. I appreciate the work that has been done by the United Nations Population Fund with regard to women's reproductive health and gender-based violence survivors in some of those complex emergencies.

The consequences of war on women and girls go beyond sexual violence. In conflict and in natural disasters gender inequality compounds the many obstacles to accessing food, water, sanitation, hygiene, health care, education, employment, housing and legal identity. Child marriage in Yemen is estimated to have increased from 32 to 52 per cent, with a significant minority of girls being married before they are 15 years old. The percentage of female-headed households tripled during the current crisis, and those households have significantly lower incomes and more food insecurity. The percentage of Yemeni women who are illiterate was projected to reach two thirds, quickly erasing the hard-won gains in education and literacy, which took decades to achieve.

The maternal mortality rate in Nigeria is almost 10 times higher in the conflict-affected northeast than in the south-west. Often, that is the result of the destruction or closure of medical facilities due to insecurity. International non-governmental organizations providing specialized services on reproductive health and clinical management of rape recently left the Central African Republic because they could not protect their aid workers. A maternity hospital in Hama, Syria, was attacked at least 10 times, and finally put out of service in April of this year. Only a few months ago, we celebrated the release of 82 of the Chibok schoolgirls, most of whom are now young women, after more than three years in captivity. They are being supported with extensive trauma counselling, medical care, educational support, child care, and allowances for personal upkeep and family visits. UN-Women is glad to be part of that process. The Council had the opportunity to hear directly from one of the escapees two weeks ago and everyone in the room was visibly moved by her testimony. We must do something to find the girls who are still missing.

At a time when mass abductions, trafficking, forced recruitment and radicalization are the common tactics of violent extremist groups, we have much to learn about the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees and their children. The Council has debated peacekeeping reform multiple times over the past year alone. Peacekeeping operations are one of our most important tools and the face of the Organization in many corners of the planet. We have been calling for more women in peacekeeping for 17 years. Now, the numbers are still very low. We have been trying to stamp out sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers for almost as long, and we have fallen short at every turn. Thankfully, the Secretary-General is taking that issue very seriously, as we can see by the current developments. This damages our effectiveness and our reputation, if we are unable to cross the line.

I welcome all the measures put in place to change that, which are detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security. I encourage the States Members of the United Nations to consider using all the tools at their disposal, from conditions to financial incentives. It is encouraging to see the reduction in the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Central African Republic, recent improvements in victim support and assistance and that a culture of accountability is taking hold. It is dispiriting, however, to see gender advisory posts being lost or downgraded due to cuts in the peacekeeping budget. Gender should not be cut first whenever budgets must be managed, and for very good reason.

This is a time when we need more gender expertise and capacity in our missions and country teams, rather than less. For example, both the United Nations and the Security Council agree on the importance of gender and conflict analysis. We are committed to collaborating with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations partners and to ensuring that that analysis is reflected in mission planning, mandates, budgets and drawdown. It is equally crucial for our prevention work, as gender equality is one of our most reliable indicators of peace.

The Peacebuilding Fund again exceeded the minimum 15 per cent target in 2016 and allocated 19.2 per cent of funds to gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal objective. That is something to celebrate. I call on all donors to reward the Peacebuilding Fund's good track record in financing and driving innovation in gender-responsive peacebuilding, and to continue supporting this vital instrument of United Nations work. The instrument works well. The 15 per cent standard should be adopted by donors in their bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and by multi-partner trust funds in conflict-affected and fragile settings, such as that proposed for Liberia upon withdrawal of the mission.

With more resources, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, the only United Nations fund dedicated solely to women, peace and security, will be able to support women's organizations in many more places, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Iraq to Somalia and to Palestine. Women in those countries should not be left to their own devices when we have instruments to support them. Women's human rights defenders are under tremendous attack and we do not have enough to protect and support them. They need all our

support and the support of the Council. The least we can do is to protect their space to speak out and raise their voices.

I would like to applaud the Council for regularly inviting women from civil society organizations to brief it when discussing specific countries. I call upon all members to support the new practice — a commitment the Council adopted in resolution 2242 (2015). I also applaud other innovations in the Council's work, such as the adoption of the first-ever resolution devoted solely to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, and human trafficking and sexual violence and their intersection with violent extremism, as well as the work of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security. But the Council can and should do more to put its full political weight behind the implementation of the agenda. I

n closing, we can build on the progress we have made. The annual report of the Secretary-General has many examples of the international community's will to find alliances and form coalitions in pursuit of the protection and empowerment of women. The regional roster of women mediators has been established. The African Women Leaders Network is one example of the ever-stronger cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union on this issue, which has also been supported by Germany. A total of 68 countries in our territories have adopted national action plans, and 63 countries are now part of the new women and peace and security national focal points network. We know that with more resources we can do more, as we have seen with the Peacebuilding Support Office.

We have expanded our work on preventing violent extremism to over 25 projects across several countries and regions. More than 60 countries, international and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations have united through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies. A total of 122 countries voted to adopt a historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and women-led groups rightly received the Nobel Peace Prize for their tireless campaign and organization efforts, which is another major achievement.

There are some encouraging signals for gender justice in the international courts, despite some of the challenges we face. Only a few days ago, the Economic Community of West African States court in Banjul set a significant precedent by making its first-ever judgment on the violation of the Maputo Protocol, which is an important provision for addressing gender equality in Africa.

The women and peace and security agenda continues to expand its footprint on global policymaking. It is now an essential pillar in global affairs but its advocates and champions are animated by the conviction that it is only the beginning. I share that conviction. The chorus of voices that are appalled by the persistent political marginalization of women in decision-making is becoming louder. The number of people who are determined to find solutions to the human suffering caused by conflict is growing. This agenda unites us because people from all over the world, every day, look up to the United Nations for peace, equality and inclusion.