

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): My delegation wishes to thank the French presidency of the Council for convening this very timely open debate on women and peace and security. I also wish to extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts on this issue.

Women can change the world for the better. For that to happen, national Governments and international organizations, such as the United Nations, must provide the space for women to shape key decisions concerning national security. We are strongly encouraged by the commitment of the Council to reinvigorating the discussion on women's participation in peace and security.

In many ways, the landmark resolution 1325 (2000), adopted 17 years ago, changed our perception towards ensuring the increased representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, as well as peacebuilding. Yet, 17 years after the resolution was adopted, and 40 years after the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, we have far too little to show.

The Maldives is blessed in that it is a peace-loving and peaceful country. At the same time, we in the Maldives also recognize women's role in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as part of the larger historic and holistic agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment. The principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the heart of the Maldives Constitution. The Maldives has achieved gender parity in education, with more female graduates than male, and more women with doctorate degrees in higher education. Women comprise over 60 per cent of our civil service and 40 per cent of our judiciary staff, inclusive of court officers and administrative staff.

National laws have been strengthened with new laws on sexual harassment, domestic violence and sexual offences to ensure the protection of women from sexual, physical and psychological abuse and violence. As a further step towards women's empowerment, new policies have been established by President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom that guarantee that 30 per cent of seats in all management boards of State companies go to women.

Legislation, laws and policies can take us only so far. As we see it, resolution 1325 (2000), with gender equality at its core, can be realized only through a change in our social practices, moving towards a culture of respect for women, of inclusivity, of recognizing that women, by virtue of being human, have equals rights as men. Changing laws are important, but ultimately it is the change in hearts and minds that matters.

Research shows that seeing more women in positions of power and decision-making roles can in turn increase acceptance and, thereby, the perception of women in decision-making. That is why the Government of Maldives has focused on ensuring that women have an equal share in key decisions of the Government. That is why our police force is celebrated as having the highest percentage of women in South Asia. That is why, here at the United Nations, our envoys

— our messengers of peace — must include women at the top levels. As a symbol of commitment, the Secretary-General could perhaps increase the number of women as his special representatives, especially in conflict resolution.

Countries and societies will become stronger, more prosperous, more stable and, indeed, more peaceful when women are agents and managers of change. The Council can and should drive that change. The Council can do that with more credibility if it is more inclusive, and the Maldives stands ready to contribute to and be the partner in shaping our common future — a shared destiny where women will call the shots.