

Mr. Linkevičius (Lithuania): I thank the President for organizing this highly pertinent open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the representative of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations for their briefings.

Since the inception of the United Nations, peacekeeping — a concept that was not even mentioned in the Charter of the United Nations — has developed into an indispensable tool for the maintenance of national peace and security. Over time it has become a flagship activity of the United Nations.

Today peacekeepers operate in much more challenging environments than at any time in history. They serve in areas where there is no peace to keep. The multidimensional character of today's peacekeeping and the new, demanding realities on the ground point to the urgency of peacekeeping reform.

As a troop-contributing country, Lithuania has a great interest in making United Nations peacekeeping more efficient and correspondent to the needs of the twenty-first century. In October, an additional 34 troops from Lithuania will join the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, making a total of 39 service members — a contribution to be maintained through the next year.

More than two years ago, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations published its recommendations on peacekeeping reform (see S/2015/446). It is true that the implementation and follow-up of those recommendations has been far too slow. Recent peace and security reform initiatives of the Secretary-General provide us with a unique chance to build the momentum and keep the spirit of the High-level Panel alive over the next year and beyond. The reform proposals and determination of the Secretary-General give us a genuine hope that the full implementation of his reform agenda might reshape peacekeeping and bring the prevention potential of the United Nations to its full realization.

“We the peoples” are the first words of the 1945 Charter of the United Nations. However, today United Nations peace operations are rightly criticized for neglecting the very people that the United Nations is entrusted to protect. The protection of civilians under imminent threat must remain a key priority in all peacekeeping missions. In that context, I am proud to announce that, on 13 September, Lithuania endorsed and recognized the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

We are deeply concerned that, despite the long declared zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by the United Nations and related personnel, sexual abuse continues to take place. Lithuania strongly supports Secretary-General's efforts to act with determination and bring sexual exploitation to an end. A few days ago, Lithuania signed a compact on the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the President of Lithuania joined the Circle of Leadership.

Much too often, mediation and peace processes remain male-dominated. While women are disproportionately affected by conflict, the critical role of women in negotiating, keeping and building peace in their communities is often overlooked. The deployment of women's protection advisers and human rights and gender-awareness training are useful tools in peacekeeping and should be further expanded.

The safety and security of United Nations personnel and peacekeepers in the field must remain a high priority. Clear steps are needed to ensure that our peacekeepers have the capabilities they need to protect themselves first of all and, of course, fulfil their mandate. Continuous attacks against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and many other peacekeeping missions indicate the urgent need for our collective reform action. The use of technologies in peacekeeping should improve early warning capabilities and enhance the ability to detect, mitigate, deter and respond to all types of threats. That is especially pertinent where peacekeepers face asymmetrical threats.

In conclusion, we believe that both the Secretary General and Member States could build on the emerging consensus to better integrate prevention and sustaining peace into the work of United Nations peace operations. Let us unite around the proposed peace and security reform initiative of the Secretary-General and fully utilize such unique momentum to reform United Nations peacekeeping.