

**Mr. António:**

I would like to start by commending Uruguay for hosting this very important debate on sexual violence in conflict and to salute the presence, this morning, of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. I also wish to commend Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for underlining prevention as the ultimate key to tackling this scourge. Furthermore, I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng for his very insightful briefing and to thank Ms. Mina Jaf for her briefing. I would also like to join my voice to those of others in congratulating Ms. Pramila Patten, of Mauritius, as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The commitment on the part of the Security Council to giving visibility to the challenges and opportunities faced by the women and peace and security agenda simply confirms our responsibility to include a greater gender-focused perspective to address and find long-term solutions to destructive armed conflict situations. I wish to praise the steps taken forward by the international community last December with the adoption of resolution 2331 (2016), which clearly enunciates the interrelationship between trafficking in persons in conflict situations and sexual violence against women, children, internally displaced persons and marginalized communities.

We are responding to a highly complex and dynamic environment in our quest to enhance the women and peace and security agenda and tackle sexual violence in conflict. There is no other solution than to rapidly address multiform patterns of conflict in the face of transnational actors who are constantly changing their modus operandi. At the continental level, the African Union (AU) continues to develop a resilient model of prevention, which includes subregional and international partners such as the United Nations, through a collaborative approach based on comparative advantage.

In that respect, the African Union has demonstrated relentless commitment and support for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict. Although those two critical agendas have galvanized important momentum, we must acknowledge the fact that women and children continue to account for the majority of casualties in conflict situations. The public numbers of victims of sexual violence during armed conflict remain horrendous. The African Union has demonstrated the inflexibility of its position on the recruitment and abuse of women and children and sexual violence perpetrated against them by parties to armed conflict. We have a zero-tolerance position when it comes to sexual violence in conflict.

At the national level, several AU States members have demonstrated their commitment to preventing and deterring sexual violence in conflict — by adopting codes of conduct prohibiting sexual violence, through judicial investigations to hold perpetrators accountable and by training police services to better address sexual violence. While the number of women among the uniformed personnel of military and police forces remains limited, the AU leadership still holds the position that proactive steps should be taken by peacekeeping missions to increase the number of civilian positions held by women.

The African Union Commission remains at the forefront of the women and peace and security agenda. The Chairperson early on recognized the valuable advances that we can achieve by including women in the practical and operational responses to peace and security threats. The AU has made the protection of women's and children's rights a continental priority, notably by designating, in 2014, Ms. Bineta Diop as the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, and by including the women and peace and security and children and armed conflict agendas in the African Peace and Security Architecture Roadmap 2016-2020.

The Chairperson placed a strong emphasis on conflict prevention during the AU-United Nations summit held in New York in April. By integrating the two agendas within the five strategic priorities of the African Peace and Security Architecture for the next three years, the AU has reaffirmed that gender, peace and security are essential elements of the overall African peace and security strategy.

To date, the African Peace and Security Architecture has striven to strengthen women's participation in peace, security and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa and to improve the quality of early-warning mechanisms and the effectiveness of the institutions responsible for addressing issues related to protecting women and children in conflict and post-conflict contexts. In that respect, the African Peace and Security Architecture Roadmap should be seen as a key contribution to mainstreaming gender issues into the African peace and security agenda. It concretely seeks to ensure women's and children's protection and the increased participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding strategies.

As we seek to enhance women's participation in prevention and mediation efforts, I have the pleasure, as already mentioned by the German delegation, to announce that the African Union Commission, in partnership with UN-Women and the Federal Republic of Germany, is organizing a high-level forum on women leaders for Africa's transformation, from 31 May to 2 June here in New York. The three-day forum will serve as a platform to launch the African Women Leaders Network, a new initiative aimed at bolstering women's leadership in governance, peace and security for the transformation of Africa. The initiative represents an important milestone in our shared path towards implementing resolution 1325 (2000) and the women and peace and security agenda in Africa.

The African Union Commission remains a key partner in prevention strategies that seek to address the scourge of sexual violence in conflict and to leave no one behind. We have developed specific legal instruments. However, it is clearly the time for all stakeholders to accelerate the practical implementation phase. We recognize the need to provide women with funding and capacity-building on peace and security issues and to strengthen initiatives and mechanisms to combat conflict-related sexual violence.