

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom):

I thank the briefers for their insights and I welcome Ms. Paleki Ayang to the Council. We should hear the voices of women activists from civil society in the Chamber more often.

I would like to begin with the words of another activist, Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee. In 2003, her group Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace successfully pressed Charles Taylor to attend peace talks. Talking afterwards, she said, “We are now taking this stand to secure the future of our children, because we believe, as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, ‘Mama, what was your role during the crisis?’”

“What was your role during the crisis?” The answer to that question for so many women in Africa is not negotiator; it is not envoy; it is not delegate even, and that needs to change. It is not just about ending gender inequality. It is not just a women’s issue; it is a peace issue. When women’s voices are heard in peace processes, in negotiations and in State-building, the chances of a lasting peace increase. If we are serious about truly resolving conflicts and preserving peace — not just for hours, but for generations — we must heed the words of Leymah Gbowee and our briefer Paleki Ayang. They demonstrate just how powerful community-based activism can be. Just think how powerful those women’s voices could have been had they actually been in the room at key times in peace processes. So, whether in Africa or in any other part of the world, we need to make sure that women are playing the fullest role in conflict resolution. I am proud that all future United Kingdom-hosted peacebuilding events will ensure that women’s voices are heard. If the rest of the Council were to follow suit, then we would send a strong message to the rest of the world.

To support that effort, we have to increase women’s participation in politics and society. That means delivering on the commitments we made in resolutions 1325 (2000), 1889 (2009), 2242 (2015) and so many others because breaking down barriers facing women in peace talks requires breaking down barriers facing women across society. It means helping girls stay in school, improving health care and, yes, tackling sexual violence. At its heart, it is about ending discrimination against women. We all have a part to play. In Somalia, the United Kingdom is helping make health services available to over 1 million Somali women and children, but also providing legal assistance to thousands of Somali women and will soon be supporting initiatives that boost their participation in politics too.

But this issue will not be solved by one country alone. That is why the United Kingdom is contributing \$1 million to the Global Acceleration Instrument for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (GAI). By funding the GAI, we can all offer material support that can break down those barriers. In Burundi, a network of women mediators was able to deal with 5,200 local conflicts in 2015. That is over 14 a day. Thanks to the GAI, they are now scaling up their activities. At a time when the Council has been so frustrated by the crisis in Burundi, it is heartening to see how powerful women’s civil society can be in their local mediation efforts.

Ultimately, however, supporting this effort requires more than just our money. When the Council visited Mali, Guinea Bissau and Senegal earlier this month, there was not a single female representative of the Council on the trip. And even at Headquarters in New York, only two of the 15 Security Council member countries are represented by a woman at this debate. Since we call upon Africa’s leaders to do more to bring women into conflict prevention and resolution, let us

also heed the call ourselves. What signal does it send when the primary body for preserving international peace and security only has one woman among its 15 permanent representatives. What message does it send to that young girl in Somalia who dreams of becoming president, or to those who want to answer the question “What was your role?” with something other than “survivor”? If we want half of the world’s population to have a say in conflict prevention and resolution, then let us begin in this building. That is why the United Kingdom has been clear that we need as many credible women as possible to apply to be the next Secretary-General. We have had three so far and I hope that there are more to come.

It is time to make history and bring about a historic moment that is long overdue. All things being equal, we hope that this will be the year that we appoint a woman to be Secretary-General for the first time. When asked “What was your role?”, she will be able to say that she was at the forefront of the United Nations action to prevent conflict and resolve crisis and represent the entire world, not just half of it.

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