

Statement by Under-Secretary-General Michelle Bachelet to the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Security

Statement by Michelle Bachelet UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women at the United Nations Security Council on Women, Peace and Security, 24 April 2012, New York.

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Madame President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the President of the Council for inviting me to brief you on recent developments on women, peace and security.

I will focus on women's engagement in conflict resolution and transitional justice and touch briefly on some patterns we are observing in recent post-conflict elections.

Since January 2011, UN Women and the Department of Political Affairs have pursued a joint strategy on gender and mediation to increase the availability of gender expertise to mediation teams and the number of women as mediators, observers and negotiators in peace processes managed by the United Nations.

The Department of Political Affairs increased women candidates in its rosters of mediators to 36 per cent. Rapid response capacity has been strengthened. The UN Mediation Standby Team has a gender expert for the second year running.

Guidance on how to address sexual violence in peace talks has been developed, and Member States are now invited to make active use of this expertise to render conflict mediation and prevention efforts more inclusive.

In 2011, we supported mediation training for more than 200 women leaders and some men leaders from West Africa, the Balkans, Central and South East Asia.

The West Africa mediation trainings have already yielded results.

In Senegal, participants took action during last month's election to create the 'Women's Situation Room for Peaceful Elections,' working to ensure women's protection in campaigning and voting and providing early alerts of electoral violations.

In Sierra Leone, participants from the same mediation training are now being encouraged to take this 'situation room' approach in the upcoming elections. In the current crisis in Mali, participants engaged last week in the Ouagadougou dialogue on political stabilization have succeeded in ensuring that gender-based violence is mentioned in the resulting Declaration.

Unfortunately, as a rule, the high level of women's engagement in informal efforts does not translate into significant presence or influence in formal conflict resolution or political dialogue. In some Arab States, women's contributions to the front lines of democratization have in the main not yet translated into leadership roles in decision-making institutions.

On my recent visit to Libya, I met with women leaders from civil society and government.

They conveyed their perception that their contributions to the struggle for democratization had been under-recognized, and they are not playing the meaningful role they aspire to in building a new democratic Libya. They raised concerns in relation to the upcoming elections and voiced support for sex-segregated polling stations to counteract pressure to follow family voting patterns.

I reminded them that they must make themselves relevant to the political process – to demonstrate they are an important constituency for peace and democracy.

We know full well that in political transformations, the already-organized political interest groups are most successful at seizing power. Women's groups tend to be underfunded and are often poorly positioned to seize opportunities to influence politics.

Given the current crisis in Syria, this remains a matter of concern. Women's participation is vital both in resolving the crisis and in making sure that women's interests are addressed in agreements moving forward. Women's participation is also needed to improve reporting on gender-specific impacts of violence. Up to now it has been difficult to obtain information, and I urge the Council to be attentive to the gender dimensions of the crisis.

In conflict resolution, women's participation and gender expertise provide a firm foundation for women's post conflict participation.

Both numeric and substantive representation are needed. For this, special efforts and measures are often required.

In Yemen, there is now heightened determination amongst women's civil society groups to be involved in the forthcoming national dialogues. UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP are supporting women's engagement in Yemen's upcoming transition.

I am concerned about early findings from a joint UN assessment of rising levels of violence against women, abduction and early marriage amongst displaced populations.

Madame President,

In Somalia during the Second National Constitutional Conference in February, DPA staff advised on the adoption of measures to ensure that at least 30 percent of the members of the future Interim Independent Electoral Commission, the National Constituent Assembly and the new Federal Parliament seats would be women.

Women should also be supported to engage in other peace-building encounters such as international contact group meetings and donor conferences. In December 2011 efforts were made to ensure women's participation in both the Bonn conference on Afghanistan and the Washington D.C. conference for South Sudan.

However, I would like to stress that women's participation in these processes should not be dependent on the willingness of conference organizers to extend invitations to them.

We need to address the obstacles that women face in being informed about, and participating in, formal conflict resolution. An important resource in this regard is your continued encouragement to mediators, envoys, advisors and Member States to bring women into conflict resolution.

By requesting updates about outreach to women's groups, the Council encourages stronger attention to gender issues on the part of mediators. In this regard, I note that mandate renewals for UN missions, such as the recent one for Afghanistan, have been explicit about the imperative of women's participation. This imperative should be extended to their engagement in any type of national, regional and international engagement process designed to support the reconciliation processes.

Madame President,

I now turn to note progress in addressing gender issues in rule of law and transitional justice measures.

As the Security Council noted in January, the rule of law is "one of the key elements of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace building." Since 2004, the Council has made reference to the rule of law and transitional justice in more than 160 resolutions.

As declared by the Secretary General, we have entered into a new age of accountability. This accountability must include effective prosecutions of war crimes against women and adequate redress.

In recent months we have seen an amnesty law passed in Yemen, amnesty granted in Mali, and blanket amnesties debated in other settings, including Nepal. One of the concerns raised by women's groups is that amnesties for war crimes against women contribute to a post-conflict environment of impunity for gender-based violence.

Prosecutions are crucial for the credibility of efforts to re-assert the rule of law after conflict. In this regard, I welcome the completion of the first case of the International Criminal Court.

The Council through its referral mechanism has contributed to ensuring the effectiveness of this Court. In relation to the two ad hoc international courts – the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia – in the past year, this Council has established a follow-up body, which will take over when they close.

It is important that this mechanism includes a specific review of the lessons learned from the prosecution of sexual and gender based crimes. These lessons should be applied in the work of the ICC and in UN peacekeeping missions assisting domestic actors to prosecute these crimes. UN Women will work with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda on such a review.

While prosecutions of individual perpetrators are crucial, transitional justice measures can ensure truth-telling and a process of repair and redress. I draw your attention to the fact that in the past two years there has been strong gender analysis evident in the reports of Commissions of Inquiry.

In the past year alone the Commissions established for Libya, Syria, and Cote D'Ivoire have included gender experts and produced important findings on sexual and gender-based crimes. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is to be commended for this.

What is needed now is implementation and support for follow-up. The Commission of Inquiry for Libya found that on sexual and gender based crimes, the severe obstacles to reporting – stigma, family pressure, and fear of reprisals — meant few victims were willing to come forward. The Commission concluded that sexual violence played a significant role in provoking fear in various communities.

I commend the Government and the National Transitional Council for implementing many of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry by partnering with the UN to address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. In Libya, UN Women has provided the SRSR with a senior gender advisor to support efforts of the Libyan authorities and civil society on women's engagement in the transitional process.

Reparations programmes are also needed in transitional justice processes. Reparations for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence can link redress for individuals with efforts to eliminate economic and social marginalization, thus addressing some of the root causes of violence against women.

As the role of peacekeeping missions grows in the area of rule of law and support for transitional justice, the Council can make a major difference to women survivors of violence by supporting the early establishment of comprehensive national reparations programmes.

Madame President, allow me to register a particular concern about the instability of legal frameworks on women's rights in post-conflict countries and the threat of a loss of gains on women's legal rights. In March religious leaders in Afghanistan called for restrictions on women's rights, including their mobility and social standing.

In countries undergoing transition, the combination of recent conflict and weakened social protection threatens to undermine progress in women's rights.

As a matter of principle, women's rights must never be used as negotiating instruments, as a soft bargaining chip to placate certain social groups. Particular attention should be paid by this Council to ensuring that women's rights are not eroded during mission draw-down.

Country-specific resolutions should encourage gender-sensitive constitutional and legal reform, ensuring women's rights and protection.

I strongly urge the Council to support increased numbers of women in leadership positions, in constitution making processes and inclusion in the justice and security sector work of UN missions. Women's participation in political, legislative, judicial and security institutions is perhaps the greatest resource on offer to promote peaceful and inclusive transitions.

Madame President,

Throughout this briefing, I have stressed that implementation of the Council's resolutions on women, peace and security requires women's leadership.

Elections are the key means for the legitimate entry of more women to public office and for bringing women's issues into policy debates. Therefore, I will now make a few observations about recent post-conflict elections before handing over to Under-Secretary-General Ladsous to elaborate further on this topic.

In the five parliamentary elections held in countries with UN missions in 2011, there were either small declines or just a modest increase in the number of women elected. The result was an average of a low 10 percent of seats in parliament for women.

Looking ahead, 10 elections in countries on the agenda of the Council are expected in 2012. To increase women's representation, temporary special measures such as positive action, preferential treatment and quota systems are required as recommended in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Madame President, in conclusion allow me to quickly restate some of our suggestions to the Council.

First, continued consultations with envoys, SRSGs, advisors and Member States on women's participation in conflict resolution and political dialogue create an incentive to engage more women in peace making and peace-building processes.

Second, more opportunities must be made available to women to engage in conflict resolution and peace-building forums, and this can be done by ensuring that women are invited to a wider range of international engagement processes and donor conferences.

Third, the follow-up mechanism for the International Criminal Tribunals in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia offers the opportunity for a review of lessons learned from the prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes – lessons that can be applied to future international tribunals and domestic judicial processes.

Fourth, country-specific resolutions and mandate renewals should encourage gender-sensitive constitutional and legal reform and discourage legal restrictions on women in the name of reconciliation.

Fifth, early technical assistance to post-conflict governments to support reparations programmes can help address gender-based inequalities and promote inclusive and sustainable peace-building.

Sixth, and finally, steps must be taken to address the barriers to women's participation in the upcoming elections in countries on the Council's agenda.

Once again, Madame President, Distinguished delegates, I thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to our discussions.