

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, November 30th 2012,
Security Council Chamber**

Statement by Ms Bineta Diop, Founder and President of Femmes Africa Solidarité– speaking on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to address the Security Council this morning. I speak today on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. I am also here today in my capacity as Founder and President of Femmes Africa Solidarité, an international non-governmental organization with over 15 years of experience advocating for women's human rights in Africa.

The theme of this year's open debate on women and peace and security, which focuses on women's civil society organizations, is timely. Twelve years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the vital work of civil society, particularly women's groups, in ensuring international peace and security must be recognized and supported, specifically with political access, resources and respect.

I recently returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I conducted a solidarity mission to assess the situation of our sisters in the eastern part of that country. I saw for myself the degrading situation of women, in particular in the Kanyarucinya refugee and displaced persons camp, and the immense suffering of the women in HEAL Africa Hospital in Goma and Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, where women's bodies are being repaired after sexual assaults and other violence. I was caught in the fighting during the taking of Goma by rebels from the Mouvement du 23 Mars, and I saw people who were already displaced become displaced yet again with nowhere to go. I promised the women whom I met that I would echo their voices calling urgently for peace, security, protection and humanitarian assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I promised them that I would come to talk to the Security Council. We should not let them down this time.

Today, I will highlight three key issues — first, the contribution of women's organizations to international peace and security; secondly, the importance of conflict prevention; and, thirdly, the security threats women and women's human rights defenders face in conflict settings.

First, despite the constraints and barriers we face, women play a central role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding at community, national and international levels, from early warning to post-conflict reconstruction. For example, in the women's "situation room", mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, established during the 2012 elections in Senegal, it was the combination of women mobilizing communities for peace, mediating between opposing groups, and monitoring and reporting incidents of irregularity that contributed to peaceful elections in Senegal.

Regarding conflict resolution, despite much rhetoric and many commitments, the percentage of women and gender expertise included in the implementation of peace accords is unacceptably low. That continuing exclusion is demonstrated in recent data in

the Secretary-General's report, as presented to us by Ms. Bachelet. We also see a lack of women at the table in current peace processes, such as those under way in Colombia and Myanmar; in the negotiations between the Sudan and South Sudan; and, as the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations has just told us, in the regional negotiations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Women are not absent because they lack negotiating skills or because they cannot make vital contributions to peace processes. In Colombia, women's groups have united to create Women for Peace, a new movement offering concrete recommendations and proposals for the nascent peace process. Malian women, as the Deputy Secretary-General mentioned, together with women from across West Africa, have been active for months over the crisis in Mali, asserting their right to engage in the efforts to bring about a political solution to the crisis, and reminding all actors that women have been specifically targeted in the violence, especially in northern Mali. Women in Syria have been raising their voices but are vastly underrepresented, if not completely excluded, from efforts to seek a diplomatic solution to the ongoing conflict.

Women's priorities are not secondary or special-interest concerns in these processes. They are integral to making peace more robust and sustainable, and it is the responsibility of all relevant actors to ensure that women representatives, women's human rights and gender expertise are embedded in all efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, be they informal or formal conflict-resolution processes or related to rebuilding after conflict. This includes disarmament programmes and security sector, judicial, political and constitutional reform.

Secondly, the most effective way to fulfil commitments and obligations in the area of women and peace and security is to prevent conflict from occurring. We must challenge the underlying causes of human rights violations against women and girls in armed conflict, including gender discrimination, gender-based violence, militarization and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. That means ensuring women's active participation in designing and implementing disarmament and prevention strategies; it also means that Member States should adopt a comprehensive arms trade treaty with legal and enforceable prevention criteria for gender-based violence.

Thirdly, as we observe the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, violence against women and girls remains widespread and far too often is committed with impunity. During conflict and long after conflict end, violence against women and girls is unacceptably high and remains an enormous barrier to women's full participation in social, economic and political life. Due to their work exposing violence against women and other human rights violations, women's human rights defenders are exposed to threats, intimidation, violence and at times alienation from their own communities. Those in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the Middle East often face serious personal risk and sometimes death.

Last month, Denis Mukwege, an outspoken supporter of victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who has continually called for peace in his country

and who is well known to many in this Chamber for his advocacy of women's rights, was attacked in his home. I was there visiting the Panzi Hospital, and the women are asking for his return. There are thousands of advocates like Mr. Mukwege who, despite such risks, are working to implement the Council's resolutions on women and peace and security.

The Security Council and all Member States should offer concrete support to efforts to achieve accountability for violations of women's rights, and particularly of international humanitarian and human rights laws. In addition, protection and prevention measures must ensure the safety of women, including those who are displaced, refugees or disabled.

I would like to conclude my statement with a call for action to the international community, including United Nations Member States and Security Council members in particular. I urge them to engage women's groups as key partners in peace, mediation, negotiation and governmental processes; demonstrate leadership and prioritize women's rights by implementing national and regional action plans for compliance with resolution 1325 (2000); meet regularly with women's groups and women leaders — and I commend the proposal just made for the holding of regular meetings rather than an annual one, particularly under the leadership of UN-Women and other women's groups; and ensure that women's priorities are substantively incorporated into all relevant negotiations. We call on the Council to make those priorities non-negotiable and to allocate the political and financial resources to women's civil society organizations that are necessary to their engagement and authority as partners in national, regional and international communities. Finally, we call on Security Council members to show themselves to be role models by consistently and fully implementing resolution 1325 (2000).

Women whose communities and lives are affected by conflict demand that the Security Council, with its mandate for maintaining international peace and security, and all Member States and United Nations actors support them and champion women's human rights. From the women in Sri Lanka seeking to rebuild their lives, to the women in Afghanistan demanding a voice in shaping their country's future; from the women seeking protection and medical care in the Kivus, to the women driven from their homes by violence in Colombia; from the women in Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sudan still seeking justice, to the human rights defenders in Iraq and the women disarmament activists in Côte d'Ivoire — these women are rightly expecting the Council to turn its words into action. Women suffering count on us. Together, we have innovative ideas, solutions and means. What are we waiting for?