

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
October 2014, Security Council Chamber**

Statement by Mr. Drobnyak, Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations

Croatia thanks the Argentine presidency for convening this annual debate on women and peace and security, because it is an important issue that requires our full and constant attention.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Croatia welcomes the focus of today's debate on refugee and internally displaced women and girls, in particular the women's role as leaders in displacement and refugee settings and, in the broader context, their role in addressing the root causes of the conflicts that resulted in the displacement. We also welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/693), as well as the presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/21) adopted earlier today.

Today's debate comes at a timely juncture, in light of the forthcoming 2015 high-level review of the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), as well as a massive increase in global forced displacement. For the first time since the Second World War the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has exceeded 50 million people worldwide. Half of that population are women and girls. That is not only a reason for our deep concern; it is also an incentive for concrete actions.

Croatia is particularly worried about the recent rise of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism that leads to new mass displacements, increased incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, targeted attacks on women and girls and those defending their rights, and other atrocities and human rights violations. One of the reasons why my country pays so much attention to that matter is the fact that Croatia itself experienced war and a long and painful refugee crisis. In the 1990s we provided protection and assistance for hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, as well as for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of whom were women and children.

We know from our own experience how war can affect women and girls. Women suffered violations of their human rights, including rape and maltreatment. Rape was used as a tactic of war and an instrument of ethnic cleansing. We have seen the impact of the violations on women's human rights, on their lives and on their physical and mental health. Our own experience teaches us the importance of adequately addressing conflict-related violations of women's rights, including sexual violence, and of providing necessary assistance, health care, psychological counselling and financial support for those women.

Displaced women and girls are among the most vulnerable groups in the world. The reasons often lie in the entrenched gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory legal frameworks and practices, including gender-based discrimination in access to documents and resources, education and employment, poor reproductive health care and exclusion from decision-making processes.

However, women should not be seen only as victims of conflict. They are also agents of peace and should be an integral part of decision-making in the process of restoring and maintaining peace and rebuilding their societies. Still, the sad fact is that women continue to face significant barriers to

successfully participating and playing roles in those processes. To ensure their equal participation and to guarantee the protection of their rights remains one of the major challenges.

Crises and conflicts increase the economic and social vulnerability of women and girls. Nevertheless, the post-conflict period also offers opportunities to transform societies in order to change the entrenched patriarchal norms, including by addressing long-standing inequalities, empowering women and ensuring their roles as leaders and agents of democratic changes in their respective communities.

At the ministerial side event that Croatia organized on the margins of the General Assembly's sixty-ninth session this autumn, as a sort of follow-up to the Peacebuilding Commission ministerial meeting held a year ago — a meeting chaired by the Croatian Foreign Minister — we had the privilege to hear inspirational stories of women from Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Africa and Croatia who help bring about peace, development and reconciliation in their communities.

We believe that it is very important that the post-2015 sustainable development framework contributes to achieving gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights. We particularly stress the importance of providing women and girls with equal access to education — but also of educating boys and men. Resolution 1325 (2000) and the subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security set out a visionary agenda for achieving gender equality as a prerequisite for peaceful, inclusive and just societies. What we need now is to translate the existing commitments into concrete actions that will bring tangible benefits for the advancement of women and girls with regard to their political and economic empowerment, as well as the full realization of their human rights, both in times of conflict and in times of peace.

Let me conclude by stressing once again that Croatia strongly supports any effort aimed at increasing the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, promoting women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and ending impunity for sexual violence in conflict, preventing and punishing acts of sexual violence, as well as bringing justice, services and reparations to victims.

We wholeheartedly advocate the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda because we strongly believe that if peace and security are to be sustained, women must be empowered, their voices heard and their participation guaranteed.