

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

*Statement by Mr. Paet, Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations*

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Estonia and Latvia. I thank all the briefers for their statements today and welcome the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/21).

Estonia and Latvia align themselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

As highlighted in the concept note prepared by the delegation of Argentina (S/2014/731, annex), throughout the development of the normative framework of the women and peace and security agenda, namely, in a number of Security Council resolutions on the subject, the particular risks faced by women and girl refugees and internally displaced persons has been addressed. Despite that, the issue has been more in the background than the specific focus of earlier Security Council open debates. Therefore, we would like to thank Argentina for choosing this relevant theme for today's debate.

The forced displacement of women and girls is not only a humanitarian issue, but a long-term development issue, a human rights issue, a peace and security issue and a key challenge for the women and peace and security agenda. It is paramount that we tackle the discrimination, human rights abuses and obstacles to justice that refugee and internally displaced women and girls are facing every day.

Throughout this year, women and children, particularly girls, have been affected by newly emerging forms of violence and conflicts associated with the proliferation of militias and armed groups linked to violent extremism. In Iraq, the terrorist movement called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has conducted the abduction, enslavement, rape, forced marriage and sale into slavery of several thousand Yazidi and other minority women and girls. In Nigeria, another extremist movement, Boko Haram, abducted schoolgirls and has been holding them captive for over six months now. The international community must resolutely oppose such barbarity.

Those are only a few examples. Sadly, the list is longer. Many protracted conflicts that deeply affect women and girls — in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — remain unresolved. Unfortunately, this year we have also witnessed a military conflict in Europe, which has caused suffering to the people of Ukraine. More than half of the registered internally displaced population in Ukraine — 66 per cent — are women, and 31 per cent are children. We welcome the steps taken by the Ukrainian Government to address the internally displaced persons (IDPs) situation. While many IDPs have been able to return to their homes in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, encouraged by the ceasefire, the overall situation of IDPs in Ukraine requires a long-term solution for their economic and social integration in host communities or successful return home. It is a duty of the international community, and especially of the Security Council, to work towards resolving conflicts and to lessen human suffering.

Unfortunately, women and girls make up about half of any refugee or internally displaced population. Therefore, we must pay special attention to their needs. The situation of refugee and internally displaced women and girls is often complicated by restricted access to resources and inequitable access to services such as education and health, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, and to training and livelihoods initiatives.

Improving the educational level of women and girls is crucial for their political and economic empowerment. Education is necessary for preventing the abuse of women and girls' vulnerable situation as refugees or displaced persons and for helping them to adjust to life after conflict and integrating them into their host society if they do not have the option to return to their home country. Currently, only 12 per cent of girl refugees attend secondary school.

It is highly regrettable that sexual violence also occurs in refugee camps. We must take resolute steps to prevent situations where women seeking refuge from war and conflict have to face new threats and fear in the camps instead.

Ensuring accountability for the perpetrators of sexual violence crimes is crucial to deterring and ultimately eliminating sexual violence. It is equally important for providing justice to victims of those crimes. As strong supporters of the 2013 Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, Estonia and Latvia will focus on the practical implementation of the commitments to end the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Sexual and gender-based violence as a war crime or crime against humanity has been prosecuted primarily at the international level. The International Criminal Court therefore has an important role to play when States lack the capacity or political will to hold perpetrators to account. Estonia and Latvia are supporting victims of gender-based and sexual violence in countries affected by armed conflict through the Trust Fund for Victims set up by the International Criminal Court.

Unfortunately, even in the United Nations own peacekeeping missions, sexual violence has been an issue. We must continue our efforts to provide training to and raise awareness in all peacekeeping missions and prioritize the fight against sexual violence when planning missions. Despite the progress achieved, continued cases of sexual exploitation threaten the credibility of the international peacekeeping system and individual missions. Those cases may also discourage victims from coming forward. Best practices described in the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/693) should be more widely used to avoid any recurrence of such situations.

It is self-evident that women's empowerment is crucial for long-lasting peace and stability. The participation of women and women's organizations in policymaking and in post-conflict reconstruction must be ensured from the outset and throughout the process. Similarly, it is necessary to support post-conflict countries in the rebuilding of judicial systems in order to ensure the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Next year we will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). Estonia has included the protection of women in national strategies on conflict prevention and has adopted a national action plan to implement the resolution.

Protecting and promoting the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls is one of the principal priorities of the humanitarian aid and development cooperation policies of Estonia and

Latvia. We have supported the alleviation of the humanitarian situation of refugees and internally displaced persons, primarily women and children, in many conflict zones. For example, Estonia supports the activities aimed at improving the quality of women's health-related education in Afghanistan, raising knowledge about reproductive health in Kyrgyzstan and ending child marriage in Yemen. As to the elimination of conflict-related sexual violence, I am glad to say that Estonia has also been providing financial support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, and we will continue to do so.

Latvia has been focusing on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) primarily through its development cooperation policy and, in close cooperation with civil society organizations, has engaged in projects aimed at the advancement of women's rights in different parts of the world, especially Central Asia.

Over the years, both Estonia and Latvia have actively promoted women's rights and gender equality at the international level. In view of the upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we will be even more engaged in our activities on the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. We are convinced that the aims of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are still very much relevant and should be integrated in the new post-2015 agenda.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), remarkable achievements have been made at the normative level, and the international community has come a long way since the year 2000. However, challenges remain at the level of implementation. We look forward to the global review next year and hope it will advance the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the follow-up resolutions.