

SECURITY COUNCIL CAN PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE IN ADDRESSING OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S

PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION, SAYS HEAD OF UN-WOMEN, IN BRIEFING

Head of Peacekeeping also Briefs, Updates Council on Security, Protection, Equal Participation of Women in Countries with Peacekeeping Presence

The Security Council could play an important role in addressing the obstacles that women faced in being informed about — and participating in — formal conflict resolution, especially by encouraging mediators to pay more attention to gender issues, Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, said today, as she briefed the 15-member body on recent developments in the area of women, peace and security.

Ms. Bachelet was accompanied by Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, who updated the Council on security, protection and equal participation of women in countries with a peacekeeping presence.

Ms. Bachelet said that since January 2011, UN-Women and the Department of Political Affairs had pursued a joint strategy to increase the availability of gender expertise to mediation teams. Last year, the two bodies supported mediation training for more than 200 female — and some male — leaders around the world. In Senegal, for example, participants had taken action during last month's election to protect women in campaigning and voting activities. Amid the ongoing crisis in Mali, participants succeeded in ensuring that gender-based violence was mentioned in the declaration from the "Ouagadougou dialogue".

Elsewhere, in the Arab States, women's contributions to democratization had not yet translated into leadership of decision-making institutions, she said, noting that she had met with women leaders in Libya who had told her they were not playing the meaningful role they aspired to in building a new, democratic country. She reminded them that they must make themselves relevant to the political process — to demonstrate they were an important constituency for democracy. "To be honest, they are facing an uphill battle," she said, noting that in political transformations, women's groups were often poorly positioned to seize opportunities for power.

In Syria, that was also a concern, she stressed. Obtaining information had been difficult and she urged the Council to be attentive to the gender dimensions of that crisis. In Yemen, UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were supporting women's engagement in the upcoming transition, but she voiced concern at early findings of increased violence against women among displaced populations. In Somalia, Department of Political Affairs staff had advised on the adoption of measures to ensure that at least 30 per cent of the future Interim Independent Electoral Commission, the National Constituent Assembly and the new Federal Parliament members would be women.

While other efforts had been made to include women in conferences on Afghanistan and South Sudan, she argued that women's involvement in those events should not depend on the willingness of organizers to invite them. States should encourage mediators, envoys and advisors to bring women into conflict resolution.

As for integrating gender into rule of law and transitional justice measures, she said the new age of accountability, as declared by the Secretary-General, must include prosecutions of war crimes against women and adequate redress. Women were concerned that amnesties for such crimes fostered an environment of impunity. That was why it was important for the follow-up body, created by the Council to take over cases from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, include a review of lessons learned from the prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes.

Transitional justice measures could also ensure a process of repair and redress, she said. Reparations programmes for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence also were needed and the Council could make a difference by supporting the early creation of national reparations programmes. She registered particular concern about the instability of legal frameworks on women's rights in post-conflict countries, saying that women's rights must never be used as negotiating instruments. The Council should pay special attention to ensuring that women's rights were not eroded during mission draw-down.

In her final observations, she said that elections were the key means for increasing women's legitimate entry to public office and bringing women's issues into policy debates. In the five parliamentary elections held in countries with United Nations missions in 2011, there had been either small declines or modest increases in the number of women elected. Looking ahead, 10 elections were expected in 2012 in the countries on the Council's agenda. To increase women's representation, temporary special measures, such as positive action, preferential treatment and quota systems, were required.

She urged the Council to continue consulting with envoys and other advisors on women's involvement in conflict resolution, and to foster opportunities for women to engage in such forums. Country-specific resolutions should encourage gender-sensitive constitutional and legal reform, while early technical assistance for reparations programmes could help promote inclusive peacebuilding.

Echoing those calls, Mr. Ladsous said elections offered the opportunity to advance resolution 1325 (2000) — on women, peace and security — in a number of ways, including through the use of temporary special measures to increase women's chances for gaining elected office. He cited the introduction of such measures in Timor-Leste, where allocations for women on candidate lists were provided ahead of parliamentary elections in June.

United Nations actors could also provide space for women to consider their priorities for political processes by reaching out to women's groups, he said, while training of female candidates was another area where some missions could make a difference. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), for example, had supported the integration of gender perspectives in the 2011 electoral process by training potential female leaders and other women involved in voter registration. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations had also developed tools — such as

gender checklists — for United Nations personnel, non-governmental organizations and political party representatives to monitor gender mainstreaming.

The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) had developed sensitization campaigns with political parties, he said, some of which had pledged to enrol more women. More support for women's legislative caucuses should be provided at regional and state levels in countries where electoral processes had taken place.

Turning to sexual violence, he said Governments were ultimately responsible for protecting their people. While peacekeeping missions could not act as a surrogate for State authority, they could support the vetting and training of national security institutions, and ensure that women became an integral part of those bodies in high-ranking decision-making roles. They also could build awareness around the link between stronger national security institutions and lower rates of sexual violence, where conflict still flared.

In Haiti, for example, the United Nations Police Gender Adviser helped to implement protection measures in camps for internally displaced persons, he said, while a Sexual and Gender-based Violence Team supported the Haitian National Police. A gender curriculum for national police cadets had been developed. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations was committed to the sexual violence mandate and its time-bound commitments, which were a strong tool for preventing such abuse. It also was rolling out new protection-related training material for troop-contributing countries. It stood ready to work with host Governments to address those commitments, and in close support of military and civilian justice systems to ensure accountability for sexual abuse.

At the same time, "we remain unsatisfied with the protection offered to women in too many places where we are deployed," he said, urging host countries to do more to redress the threats faced by women in peacekeeping mission areas. Where civilian and justice systems were weak, efforts must be renewed to strengthen related bodies. It was essential to prevent violence by establishing security institutions that had clear modalities of operation, whose elements were regularly trained and which acted in line with international law.

The meeting began at 10:30 a.m. and adjourned at 11:07 a.m.