

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me thank the Mission of France for convening this meeting on women and peace and security.

We also thank all speakers who have made strong, positive references to Afghanistan's progress with women in general. However, there is no place for complacency. We remain steadfast in our resolve to improve the lives of half of our population.

The role of women is inextricable from the promotion of peace and security worldwide. Experience has also shown that the full involvement and participation of women are not only desirable but absolutely necessary to the advancement of society, as well to preventing and resolving conflicts. Today's meeting is of particular importance to my country, Afghanistan, which has seen decades of imposed conflict, including terrorism and violence extreme, all of which has left our institutions and social fabric in a shambles.

Afghan women have borne the disproportionate burden of violence and suffering for a long period of time. Their basic rights and fundamental freedoms were completely denied under Taliban rule, as they had no access to education, health care or employment.

Needless to say, the plight of Afghan women has seen profound improvements since the fall of the Taliban regime, which marked the start of a new era in our modern history. Since 2001, we have seen tremendous progress across all spectrums of society. Today, the National Unity Government is consolidating the gains of recent years. Women's equality in all spheres remains an important national priority, as we are committed to furthering women's participation and role in all stages of decision-making, particularly in relation to peace and security issues.

Our commitment to women's empowerment is embedded in our firm resolve to meet our pledges within the framework of our national and international obligations, including the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the international treaties to which we are party. To that end, the Government of Afghanistan is sparing no effort to meet the goals of resolution 1325 (2000). The Afghanistan national action plan on women and peace and security remains the overarching framework for implementing that hallmark resolution. A key component of our strategy relates to ensuring women's participation in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, as well as other matters related to peace and security.

Ending the cycle of terror, violence and conflict in Afghanistan is the surest way to protect and promote the rights of all our citizens, particularly women. In this respect, women are front and centre in our national peace process as members of the High Peace Council and civil society, as human rights advocates, and as members of Parliament and Government. Accordingly, the participation of women in peacebuilding efforts is recognized as a prerequisite for peace and reconstruction across the country. In the broader context, there is a common acknowledgement that durable peace and stability in Afghanistan require the participation of women in every aspect of society, be it social, political or economic. The national action plan for the women of Afghanistan, spanning the years 2008 to 2018, commits the Afghan Government to increasing

women's representation in the civil service to 30 per cent. The Ministries of the Interior and National Defence have committed to increasing women's representation in those institutions by 20 per cent over the next 10 years. Furthermore, my delegation is pleased to report that at present more than 3,000 female armed-service members and police officers are proudly serving in our national security forces in order to protect our citizens, combat international terrorism and preserve law and order. In the economic domain, the launch of our national programme for women's economic empowerment has marked another important step forward in the advancement of women. It has supported 67,000 women in agricultural activities and empowered 35,000 in the livestock sector, and it is also recruiting 3,000 female teachers and 900 community midwives and nurses.

Physical protection from any form of violence constitutes an integral component of our national efforts to empower women. A number of national structures have been established to enforce constitutional and legislative provisions to protect women. They include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, commissions in Kabul and the provinces for the elimination of violence against women, the creation of the post of Deputy Attorney-General for the Elimination of Violence against Women and a commission on the elimination of sexual abuse of women and children. Those structures are integral to the Government's promotion and protection of women's rights and to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

Amid all our gains, we realize how vital it is to continue sustaining and enhancing progress on women's empowerment on all fronts. We can say with confidence that Afghanistan has entered a new phase in its journey to transform the role of women into a powerful force of change, while contributing to the vision of a self-reliant nation that stands in lasting peace, tranquillity and stability. We are confident in our success, but the support of the international community continues to be crucially important to realizing that vision. We would like to take this opportunity to express our consciousness of the deep debt of gratitude we owe to all the friends and partners that continue to make an important contribution to our efforts. We look forward to continuing our collaboration in order to elevate our progress in the protection and empowerment of Afghan women to new heights.