

**Mr. Medan (Croatia):**

At the outset, I wish to thank the Russian presidency for convening an open debate on this crucial topic.

Croatia aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security, respectively. Allow me to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

There is a strong correlation between gender equality, peace and development. Gender equality is the only effective way to achieve sustainable peace and development. Not only women, but societies in general benefit from women's increased participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Resolution 1325 (2000) and 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.

Nearly 16 years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the international community has undertaken substantial efforts to implement it, and undeniable progress has been made, including action plans, guidelines, programmes and training. Awareness has been raised of the need to include women in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and decision-making. However, the high-level review of resolution 1325 (2000) mandated under resolution 2122 (2013), which took place in October 2015, has shown that the protection of women in armed conflict, parallel to the enhancement of their contribution to peace processes and in rebuilding their communities, continues to be a crucial challenge.

As underlined in the global study, women's participation in decision-making in the sphere of peace and security worldwide remains unacceptably low, while the extent of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations continues to be devastating. What we need now is to translate the existing commitments into concrete actions that would bring tangible benefits for the advancement of women and girls in their political and economic empowerment, as well as the full realization of their human rights in times of both conflict and peace.

Member States have the primary responsibility to ensure that global commitments and obligations concerning women and peace and security are integrated into domestic policies and laws. In that regard, more cooperation between Member States would certainly advance the women and peace and security agenda and improve its implementation. That is why Croatia strongly supports the establishment of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality under the aegis of the Office of the Focal Point for Women in the United Nations. We are convinced that the Network can greatly assist Member States and regional organizations in improving and strengthening the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, thereby complementing other existing regional and United Nations initiatives, such as those of the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security in New York and Geneva, different regional task forces and civil society.

Croatia's continued engagement in the area of women and peace and security rests on our firm belief that the full realization of women's rights is an indispensable basis for safeguarding basic human rights and achieving lasting peace and security. Croatia has therefore taken steps to integrate the gender perspective into the national foreign and security policy through its national policy for the promotion of gender equality and its first national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). One of the most important results of the first national action plan cycle has

been an increased level of awareness of the role of women in the area of peace and security and the more effective integration of the gender perspective into our foreign and security policy and actions. In the national security sector, the gender perspective has also been strengthened with an increased number of women involved in the activities of the security system, including intelligence agencies and their increased presence at the decision-making level.

The national action plan has also contributed to the appropriate, gender-integrated training of troops to be deployed to peacekeeping missions and operations and to an increased number of female members of the Croatian armed forces and police involved in international peacekeeping and civilian missions. Under the action plan, Croatia is also undertaking efforts to provide gender-sensitive development assistance, such as assistance for women and girls in Afghanistan in the areas of education, women's reproductive health and small businesses.

Croatia is currently in the process of developing its second national action plan, which is expected to be adopted by the end of the year. It will cover both our domestic and international activities by setting out and strengthening specific measures in the area of prevention and protection, as well as the representation of women in decision-making and processes concerning security and peacebuilding.

As a country having recently experienced war and acquired post-conflict management experience, we are particularly interested in sharing our experiences and lessons learned as a contribution to wider, global efforts in preventing and combating sexual violence in war and conflict. As a member of the group of global champions of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Combat initiative, Croatia will spare no effort in preventing and combating sexual violence in war and conflicts, and will continue to give its firm support to all areas of the women and peace and security agenda. We strongly believe that, if peace and security are to be sustained, women must be empowered, their voices heard and their participation ensured.