

Mrs. Schwalger (New Zealand):

I too thank our briefers and the Secretary-General for his personal commitment to advancing the Women and Peace and Security agenda.

I have four key points to make today, but frankly it is disappointing that I have to make any of them in 2016. It is my personal hope that by the time New Zealand presides over the Security Council again, there will no longer be a need for a separate women and peace and security agenda. It is also my hope that, by then, my colleagues will not feel the need to point out how special it is to thank “Madam President” because women presiding over the Council will no longer be considered a novelty. In any case, let me go back to the points that I am here to make in my national capacity.

First, the meaningful participation of women at all stages of conflict is essential to achieving sustainable peace. We know that gender equality is critical to maintaining international peace and security. We know that women and girls have a significant role to play as leaders and decision-makers in the prevention and durable resolution of conflict. As the Secretary-General mentioned, we have the data. Women’s participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 per cent. That percentage rises to 35 per cent after 15 years. But all too often, that is not reflected in our peacebuilding activities.

On a positive note, the peace process in Colombia has provided a best-practice example of women’s participation. As we have heard, Colombian women have successfully advocated for the inclusion of women and ensured that the peace process adequately addresses crucial issues, including violence against women and community displacement. That must be maintained in the ongoing dialogue towards a final peace agreement and encourage contributors to the United Nations Mission to respond to the call to deploy women.

We also commend the initiative of the Secretary- General’s Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, to establish a women’s advisory board to ensure that the voices of Syrian women are reflected in the peace process. Unfortunately, however, such positive outcomes remain rare, and we have yet to achieve the meaningful participation of women as a natural and necessary element for all peace processes.

My second point is that the Security Council should match rhetoric with action. That includes doing better in the mandates we set for peace operations, ensuring that United Nations missions have the right specialized personnel and skills sets, and being more open-minded about who briefs the Council.

Thirdly, the United Nations system must ensure that gender perspectives are integrated across activities. Appointments across the United Nations, including at senior levels, must reflect the world around us. If not the United Nations, who will take responsibility for improved representation of women at all levels? That is especially important for those operating in conflict, fragile and post-conflict environments. We should monitor and review such issues in the Fifth Committee when we approve and fund posts. That also means deploying more women in United Nations missions. And it means ensuring that those deployed — male and female — have the knowledge and training required to respond to challenges related to a lack of gender equality or women’s empowerment. That requires making greater effort within our national military and police forces. New Zealand is actively increasing the recruitment, promotion and retention of senior women within the police and the defence force. We are determined to deploy women at all levels of decision-making in conflict-resolution processes.

My final point is the need to combat conflict-related sexual violence. Like others, New Zealand condemns the use of sexual violence, including as a method of 10/90 16-34131 warfare, and supports measures to tackle this challenge. Ongoing United Nations leadership to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence will be essential. New Zealand has also consistently supported the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers. It is time for an honest conversation among the Secretariat, contributing countries and Member States about why this continues to be a problem, how to stop it and, when it occurs, how to respond.

New Zealand has full confidence that the Secretary-General-designate will take forward this important agenda. We appreciate the strong signals he has sent about his commitment to gender equality within the Secretariat, and his acknowledgement that full participation of women is essential to peace and prosperity.

We all benefit when the women and peace and security agenda is fully realized: the operational effectiveness of our peacekeeping missions improves, our peacekeeping efforts are more likely to take hold and we improve the chances of sustainable peace being achieved. Those are goals to which we all should aspire.