

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (spoke in Spanish):

At the outset, allow me to congratulate the Angolan presidency for convening this open debate and for the concept paper (S/2016/219, annex) it has circulated. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN-Women, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations and the Executive Director of the South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network for their respective enlightening briefings and statements.

I wish to start my statement today by highlighting the fact that today this organ of the United Nations is presided over by a woman at a time when we are addressing the important issue of the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. Moreover, the focus of this debate could not be more timely at a time when, despite some favourable events, peace and security on the African continent continue to be seriously threatened by the existence of serious conflicts that are devastating various countries of the region. The African continent has a number of armed conflicts, and that is where the greatest number of peacekeeping operations are deployed. It is also the poorest continent in economic terms, but it is extremely rich in natural resources. Throughout history, Africa has suffered many conflicts and wars between Governments, ethnic groups and rebel groups, and now because of the presence of terrorist organizations that have used violence as a weapon of war in order to control the population through fear.

Men and women continue to suffer without distinction the most serious violations of human rights. However, it is women and children who suffer from that extreme violence in a singular and disproportionate manner. In that context, women are subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment, causing them great suffering. Gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, genital mutilation, forced marriages and pregnancies and child marriage are just some of the situations that girls and women face daily. In that regard, the high level of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of the worst crimes against humanity is a matter of great concern. I emphasize the importance that Uruguay attaches to the women and peace and security agenda. We continue to play an active role with regard to the rights of women and girls and have, on a number of occasions, reiterated the imperative of women's participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts.

The Council has repeatedly recognized the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding. In numerous resolutions, it has called for increasing their participation and equitable, full and authentic representation in conflict prevention and mediation activities. Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the international community has made commitments with regard to the women and peace and security agenda and has made significant progress in that regard. Accordingly, resolution 1325 (2000) is of particular importance owing to the fact that, for the first time in history, the specific effects that war has on women were recognized and that the inclusion of women in peace talks ensures that peace will be sustainable over time. Uruguay therefore firmly believes that women must be at the centre of efforts aimed at resolving conflicts.

Similarly, that resolution recognized the right of women to participate actively in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflicts, including in the areas of decision-making

and peacekeeping missions, and, at the same time, stressed the specific needs involved in the protection of women and girls in armed conflict. The global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), requested by the Secretary-General prior to the high-level review undertaken by the Council on the implementation of the resolution, has demonstrated the favourable influence that women exercise in negotiation processes, thus improving the chances of reaching an agreement.

Uruguay welcomes the information provided in the concept paper (S/2016/219, annex), which details the various mechanisms, policies and structures developed in Africa aimed at creating an environment to enable women to play a more significant role in peace and security. As the concept paper points out, however, several obstacles continue to hinder the full incorporation of those efforts within more formal endeavours to prevent conflicts and achieve more sustainable peace.

The number of women in special political missions on the ground, especially in leadership positions, remains very limited, and the need for the greater participation of women persists, particularly in all mechanisms related to peace processes and postconflict reconstruction. The primary responsibility for involving women in those processes falls upon the shoulders of the African States themselves. It is at the national level that they must put in place good practices and promote greater participation of women at all levels, because that helps increase operational efficiency and reduce conflicts. Experience on the continent shows us numerous cases of women who have courageously been able to boost recovery in their communities.

Uruguay appreciates the key role of civil society, and especially that of local women's groups that assist victims in various aspects of recovery, from health services to psychological services, social and economic rehabilitation and access to justice. Yet in many cases women remain excluded from the political, social and economic spheres. In other regrettable situations, women are the victims of sexual or gender-based violence, or their fundamental rights are violated. But women must not be seen as victims only, when they are part of the solution, important actors with the potential to influence the resolution of conflicts, agents of change and ultimately peacemakers.

We note with particularly deep concern the violence against specific groups of people and the violation of the rights of women and girls stemming from terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. Armed groups operating within Africa seek the subjugation of women and the suppression of human rights as a method of control and subjugation. For our part, we understand that an effective strategy to combat terrorism and violent extremism must promote participation, leadership and the empowerment of women in order to address the factors that trigger violence by those armed groups.

Uruguay shares the idea that it is moreover necessary for the Organization to appoint more women to high-levels of decision-making, particularly in positions such as those of Permanent Envoys and Special Representatives, mediators and negotiators. Despite the trend of an increased role of women in all processes, including the appointment of women as mediators and envoys, we believe that we are far from reaching the desirable goal.

The participation of women continues to be inadequate in peace negotiations in Africa and in other regions of the world. It is uncontested that women are the most credible spokespeople for expressing the needs of local communities. They inspire the greatest degree of trust in situations that require the collection of information and testimony from the victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Women have much to say on issues, such as those involving victims, reparations and the conditions needed to ensure that conflict does not reoccur. Women also bring new approaches to negotiations, making constructive contributions to ensure lasting peace. In that regard, they endow the peace process with greater sensitivity with regard to issues that are related to family, education, gender issues and equity, and are called on to play a determining role in verifying and implementing agreements.

Moreover, the contribution of women in the peace talks is essential to building inclusive and peaceful societies based on equality and respect for human rights. Similarly, they play a significant role in postconflict situations, acting as a key foundation for the social, political and economic reconstruction of local communities. We encourage the participation of African women in national electoral processes. We have seen a number of successes in that regard in Liberia, Malawi and the current leadership of the African Union itself.

Uruguay also believes that the presence of female personnel in peacekeeping operations is necessary. My country has been at the forefront with regard to incorporating women in the armed forces and the national police and within Uruguayan contingents of peacekeeping missions. In doing so, we maintain a percentage above the average for the number of women troops deployed in peacekeeping missions. Currently, 9 per cent of the troops deployed in such missions are made up of women. Always there as volunteers, women have played a prominent role and chalked up high numbers in terms of re-enlistment, which demonstrates their commitment to peace.

Given Uruguay's experience in Africa, including participation in such missions as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we can testify to the effective role played by the women members of our contingents. In that regard, it has been observed that women's effective participation in peacekeeping operations is of particular importance, as their response differs from that of men. Similarly, women play a key role in confidence-building in local communities, especially among women who have suffered violence. They serve as a model for behaviour for other women and contribute to bringing about an increased sense of security among the people.

Currently, despite the aforementioned efforts, we must acknowledge the existing gaps with respect to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Women lead only 19 per cent of the United Nations field missions; they account for only 3 per cent of military peacekeeping personnel and 10 per cent of police peacekeeping personnel. As such, Uruguay is concerned about the opportunities and capabilities that are going to waste because greater efforts have not been made to include women in conflict-resolution processes. It has been proven that increasing the percentage of women in the police component of peacekeeping missions has a positive effect on the population, as it reduces the misuse of force or the inappropriate use of weapons and authoritarian behaviour in relations with civilians. Ultimately, the greater participation of women in all aspects of the peace process is indispensable in efforts to establish the foundation for sustainable peace in the African continent.

Another key issue that we would like to highlight is the matter of financing for the appropriate implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. We cannot achieve greater results or positively impact the lives of women and girls if we do not commit to providing the required financial support. In that regard, Uruguay wishes to highlight the commitment that we must undertake to earmarking greater funding for empowerment and gender-equality programmes.

Finally, we note last year's adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1). We welcome the inclusion of its Goal 5 on gender equality, which we believe to be essential in the light of existing gender inequality, in particular in Africa. We believe that the issue of gender equality does not exclusively concern women; rather it is a struggle that affects us all, men and women. In that context, Uruguay supports the full implementation of Goal 5 in order to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and ensure the full and effective participation of women, with equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute and convey our appreciation to all those women who work every day — often at the risk of their lives — to promote peace and security in Africa and all over the globe.

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