

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict- Affected Situations, October 18th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Araud, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

I thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate. I also thank all those who have spoken. I believe that the statements made by my colleagues have proven, 13 years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), what has become obvious to everyone, namely, that no conflict can be resolved and no transition sustained without the inclusion and participation of half of humankind.

First, that is obvious to the Council, which in two-thirds of its resolutions makes references to the women, peace and security agenda. It also obvious to the United Nations, where the presence of women in mediation teams and field missions increases year after year, although efforts still need to be made regarding management positions. In that regard, I welcome the work of UN Women and its activities to strengthen the coherence of and coordinate efforts to promote women within the United Nations. We also welcome the zero- tolerance policy for United Nations personnel that is being implemented by the Secretary-General, and which has proven to be useful and should continue.

Such improvements have had normative consequences. The adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty revealed the link between the spread of small arms and light weapons and sexual violence. We have given strong support to this part of the Treaty, which France will soon ratify.

However, we all know that we only are half-way there. Much remains to be done. While women now have a place in most peace negotiations, their situation remains ignored in the ensuing agreements, which too often do not include specific provisions on women, peace and security. Women should be consulted as fully invested stakeholders. The United Nations must be exemplary in that regard. The special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General must consult with civil society and women's organizations as soon as they arrive on the ground, and must continue to do so throughout their mandate.

In New York, the issue of the participation of women should be included more frequently in briefings made to the Council by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, whose recommendations for better including women in conflict-resolution processes always prove to be valuable. Informal meetings of the Council with women working in the field should be continued and encouraged.

In that regard, we can refer to the example of Mary Robinson, who brought together women's organizations from the Great Lakes region in July in Bujumbura. We believe that hers is a model of inclusive and early consultation that can be useful to everyone. We saw to it that this good practice was continued during the recent visit of Security Council members to the Democratic Republic of the Congo when they met, in the eastern part of that country, with women's organizations working to defend and promote the rights of women.

That and other crises demonstrate the urgent need to act. This morning, we heard an eye-witness account on the Central African Republic. We have heard that the situation is tragic, encompassing sexual violence, forced disappearances, recruitment of child soldiers and, increasingly, religiously motivated violence. The precarious situation of women is shocking. The Council should remain apprised of the issue. Not only must we take the situation of women into account; beyond that, to the extent that the tragic situation of women in the Central African Republic is only part of the broader tragedy of the entire country, we must re-establish security, peace and the rule of law there. France voted in favour of resolution 2118 (2013) in that regard and will stay the course, including, if necessary, by proposing a peacekeeping operation in that country.

In Syria, women were the leading actors of the peaceful revolution against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. Their vulnerability is today increasing everywhere, placing them at the forefront of the victims. They are the targets of both the fierce repression of the regime against its own people and, now, of extremist groups. In the refugee camps, their children are often born stateless as a result of unequal citizenship laws. We must listen to these Syrian women, who remain committed to building the future of Syria, and involve them in the peace negotiations.

In that regard, I call the Council's attention to the letter by the representative of the Syrian National Coalition, which provides a very good description of the sufferings that the Al-Assad regime is inflicting on Syrian women. Those violent acts, I remind members, were reported by the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry.

Justice remains the cornerstone of stabilization in post-conflict situations. National Governments of course have the primary responsibility for prosecuting and punishing those responsible for sexual violence. However, when States fail to live up to their responsibilities, the International Criminal Court should be able to play its full role. The Court is already at work in the Central African Republic, in Mali and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. France believes that the Court should be seized of the matter in Syria — as has now been amply justified. I should like to underscore here that all those responsible for violence against the Syrian people must one day be accountable before justice.

To make the fight against impunity tangible, access for women to the justice system is essential. Since 2011, in cooperation with UN Women, France has had in place a programme for strengthening women's access to justice in Afghanistan. In the framework of its plan of action, France has committed to a cooperation programme in Africa and in the Arab world, working in partnership with UN Women. We have recently specifically allocated support for programmes in Mali being implemented by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with a view to supporting the participation of women in political processes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have similarly allocated more than €2 million to support Congolese NGOs to fight against sexual violence, strengthen the participation of women in decision-making processes and help women integrate on the socioeconomic level. In that spirit, next December France will organize in Paris a summit on peace and security in Africa, which will provide an opportunity for all to express and reaffirm their commitment to bringing about support for resolutions on women and peace and security.