

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
October 28 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Mr. Prosor, Representative of Israel

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his remarks. Allow me also to thank Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe, President of the Economic and Social Council, for his statement, and also Under-Secretary-General Michelle Bachelet for her briefing and her leadership on the pressing issues before us.

Today the Council takes up a debate that is very important to the Jewish State and the Jewish people. Our sages often remind us of the story of Miriam, who was Moses' sister and Judaism's first female prophet.

As the Jewish people wandered through the desert for 40 years, Miriam sustained them with a well that supplied fresh and plentiful water. Upon her death, the well dried up and disappeared. The message of her story is very clear. Empowered women are the life source for thriving communities. Prosperity comes when society ensures that women are allowed to lead; it evaporates when their rights are restricted.

Those principles have been an integral part of the State of Israel since its inception. Gender equality is enshrined in our 1948 Declaration of Independence. It has been implemented through law and public policy, starting with a landmark and comprehensive piece of legislation in 1951, known as the Women's Equal Rights Law. More than 40 years ago, Golda Meir became Israel's Prime Minister — making my country just the third in the world to elect a woman to its highest office.

This year, the Israeli parliament enacted a new law as part of our implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), requiring that all Government investigative committees include an appropriate representation of women. By law, women must be included on Israeli negotiating teams. Maybe that will move a few things forward.

In a region where women are too often excluded from public life, Israeli women stand out as leaders in law, politics, mediation and conflict prevention and resolution. The opposition in the Israeli parliament is headed by a woman, Tzipi Livni. She also led the Israeli negotiating team with the Palestinians as the former Foreign Minister, and my former boss. Another woman, Shelly Yachimovich, was recently elected to lead the Israeli Labour party.

In Israel, we take pride in the fact that approximately half of our internationally renowned judiciary is made up of women, including our Supreme Court, which is led by Justice Dorit Beinisch. Women also occupy senior positions in our defence establishment. This year Major General Orna Barbivai made history when she was elevated to the second highest rank in the Israel Defense Forces.

As part of our commitment to implementing resolution 1325 (2000), Israel's Government holds workshops to promote dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women at the Mount Carmel International Training Center in Haifa. More than 650 Israeli and Palestinian women have participated in more than 20 workshops over the past eight years. Such seminars

provide women with the tools and understanding needed to promote peace and non-violence. A wide range of similar projects are now under way in Israel.

We must recognize the clear connection between advancing peace and advancing equal rights for women. Across many corners of the Middle East today, women are prohibited from driving, voting, receiving inheritances, getting an education and travelling alone in public. The subjugation of women in our region cannot be ignored; it is a major obstacle to creating real understanding between cultures and to building sustainable peace.

Peace begins at home. Children learn the values of tolerance and understanding, first and foremost, from those who raise them — usually from their mothers. We must recognize that when women are subjugated and denied access to education, these important values are damaged and lost. Empowered women hold together healthy families, build strong societies and serve as the most important bridges to other cultures.

Peace in the Middle East and around the world depends on empowering women and ensuring their equal rights. Women can and should lead the way to peace, but they must be given opportunities to sit in the driver's seat. The international community has a duty to remove the obstacles from their path, so that we all can build the foundation for a brighter future.