

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

Statement by H.E. Ms. Kamara, Representative of Liberia

It is an honour for me to participate in this debate during your presidency, Madam, which itself reflects the level of participation that we hope will become increasingly accessible to larger numbers of women. It pleases me even more, given the important contribution that your country, Nigeria, and other Member States have made towards the creation and maintenance of an environment of peace in Liberia. It is that enabling environment, coupled with visionary leadership and strong partnerships, which has allowed the Liberian Government to pursue policies that provide opportunities for the advancement and empowerment of Liberian women.

Already one year has passed since we commemorated the tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) with many activities, including a similar debate in this very Council (S/PV.6411); a plethora of commitments by Member States to translate the major tenets of that resolution into smart national action plans; the adoption of initial indicators to measure progress; and a request that the Secretary-General develop a strategic framework to guide the United Nations implementation of the resolution. It remains our challenge to meet the expectations that have been raised by those activities.

We commend the Secretary-General on his report on women and peace and security (S/2011/598*), which reflects a laudable effort to use the indicators currently available in assessing progress. The report provides some insights into good practices and progress made by Member States, regional and international organizations, as well as constraints in the global effort to fully engage women in all national processes, whether they concern peace and security or political or socio-economic development. We broadly support those recommendations.

Liberia continues to make progress in its efforts to involve women at decision-making levels in all areas of national governance. At critical junctures in Liberia's history, its women have demonstrated the ability to lead. Liberia holds the distinct honour of being the birthplace and home of the first woman and the first African to be appointed President of the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session in 1970.

In recent history, during a lull in the protracted conflict, Liberia had a female interim President, in the person of Mrs. Ruth Perry, who steered the work of a transitional Government from 1996 to 1997. Then there were the unsung heroes — the countless number of women who bravely shouldered the responsibility of caring for their families, even as they participated in discussions on peace and security, while living in the internally displaced persons and refugee camps across West Africa and further afield.

The year 2003 marked another milestone, when a group of Liberian women, led by Leymah Gbowee, appeared, uninvited, at the door of a negotiation room in Accra and vowed not to move or be moved until a peace accord was signed. Their resolve and determination were expressed in a simple song with a persistent refrain: "We want peace, no more war". A small group of mobilized and determined women morphed into a national movement that in turn translated into a groundswell of support for a female presidential candidate and culminated in the election of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President, in 2005.

Today, women's community peace huts in counties around the country are venues for conflict mediation and resolution. They also serve as safe havens for women escaping domestic violence and as counselling centres for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. In the peace huts, women address child support issues and work with local police to identify suspects who have committed crimes against women, so as to ensure their arrest and interrogation. Women also monitor the early warning signs of conflict and lead peaceful demonstrations on issues that affect their well-being.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), discussions have revealed many examples of women's effective contribution to conflict prevention, peace processes and peacebuilding in the various regions of the world. Women bear the consequences of conflict and are thus well placed to contribute to solutions. Having reached this realization, our common challenge is to find creative means to institutionalize this role at the national and international levels. Women must be capacitated and strategically positioned to play their rightful role.

Liberia is moving deliberately and purposefully towards the fulfilment of its commitments to women's advancement. There has been a gradual increase in women's presence in leadership and decision-making positions at the central and local Government levels. Gender-responsive policies, strategies and programmes, some of which are mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, are being integrated into all sectors of national action. In 2009, Liberia became one of the first countries to have completed its national action plans for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). This progress has been made possible through the consistent and much-appreciated support of development partners. All the same, inadequate resources remain a challenge and hindrance to robust implementation.

We are encouraged by the recognition that has been accorded internationally to the modest achievements made by Liberia in its efforts to meaningfully involve women in national governance and to build and utilize their productive capacities, including for the consolidation of peace. Mindful that food security has a conflict preventive dimension, I cannot fail to mention that the Hunger Project's prestigious 2011 Africa Prize for Leadership was awarded a few days ago to the Liberian Minister of Agriculture, Ms. Florence Chenoweth, for her dedication to improving the livelihoods and food security of women farmers in Liberia.

Of course, all recognitions have been crowned by the joint award of the Nobel Peace Prize to three women, two of them Liberians — President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee — each for her contribution to securing peace in Liberia, strengthening the position and enhancing the influence of women in Liberia. As Liberians, this recognition fills us with pride, even if we realize that it is intended to have impact far beyond Liberia. The message to the global community, in the words of the Nobel Committee, is to “realize the great potential for democracy and peace that women can represent”.

We are proud and inspired by these accolades, but we realize that there is still a long way to go. The incidence of rape of girls and women is still unacceptable high, and women constitute only 14 per cent of the Liberian legislature. We are humbled when we consider the vastness of the challenges that still lie ahead; the gender inequities that still exist; and the high walls that we still have to scale before female mediators and peace negotiators become normal features of the international peace architecture. We believe that the systematic use of quotas at the national and international levels could help to accelerate progress towards this objective. Affirmative action programmes are also required to give the necessary impetus to our effort to place women centrally in conflict prevention, mediation and peace processes.

Liberia pledges to make more concerted efforts to comply with reporting requirements so as to

contribute meaningfully to future reports of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security. The presence of UN-Women in Liberia provides the needed support to national efforts to implement resolution 1325 (2000) and reduce gender inequities. We therefore look forward to continued partnership with UN-Women towards the enhancement of women's empowerment, peacebuilding and sustainable development. It is our hope that, in the not too distant future, the capacities of women will be so fully integrated into the global peace architecture that the focus of debates on conflict prevention and mediation will not be on women's role and participation but simply on the subject matter.