

## **Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, November 30<sup>th</sup> 2012, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Ban Ki-moon [delivered by the Deputy Secretary-General], Secretary-General to the United Nations.*

I would like to begin with a warm expression of appreciation to both India and Guatemala, who during their Security Council Presidencies have focused our attention on the important contributions by women and women's civil society organizations to prevent to resolve armed conflict and to carry out peacebuilding.

During a recent visit to Mali I saw first-hand some of the acute challenges women face in times of crisis and conflict. My time there left a deep impression on me. I promised the women leaders with whom I met in Bamako that I would convey their message to this Council. They told me disturbing accounts of the abuses women face in the northern part of the country now under extremists' rule and occupation. Sexual violence against women is widespread. And I met women who had been raped. Despite being the primary victims of a combined security, political and humanitarian crisis, they remain excluded from the various bodies seeking possible solutions. They urged me to make known to the outside world, the need not only to ease their suffering, but to strengthen women's participation in resolving the crisis and preparing for a better future.

As these Council Members well know, extremist groups have started to implement exceedingly harsh interpretation of Sharia law in northern Mali. This has led to the separation of boys and girls at schools, forced marriages for young girls and targeted killing or maiming of women accused of having children out of wedlock. Women's rights are being dramatically curtailed, including their right to work, leaving them unable to sustain themselves or their families.

But women in Mali and across West Africa are strong and resilient. They have already demonstrated their ability, if given a chance, to bring about peace, reconciliation and development. We must empower and assist them further.

As the case of Mali clearly underlines, armed conflict affects women and men differently. This means that women have to be part of the solution. One of the key messages of the Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security is that early and sustained engagement with women is crucial to ensure the sustainability of peace efforts as well as vital to deepen democracy and to promote respect for human rights. Actively engaging women must be a priority, not an afterthought.

The role of women's organizations across the world in preventing violence, resolving conflict and building the foundations for peace is well known. Our challenge is to become more systematic in supporting and scaling up these initiatives and making the necessary links to formal peace processes. Today's debate is an opportunity to support this critical work—and to address the obstacles to women's participation in conflict mediation, peace talks, national dialogues and donor conferences. It is also critical that we accelerate progress in reaching the goals of the Secretary-General's Seven-Point Action Plan for gender-responsive peacebuilding.

The Secretary-General and I welcome the Presidential Statement on women, peace and security issued on 31 October. In this statement, the Council pledged to advance women's participation in all aspects of conflict resolution, including transitional justice.

The United Nations system is strongly committed to strengthen the rule of law. This goes particularly for women's access to justice during and after conflict -- precisely when it is most needed but is least accessible. We are reviewing the United Nations' programming in order to galvanize a stronger and more effective impact in this area. The declaration of the 24th of September adopted at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law has given new impetus to these efforts.

Through the evolution of the women, peace and security agenda over the past 12 years, through country-specific decisions and mission mandates, the Security Council has demonstrated that decisions made around this table can tangibly improve the lives of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. We must however, ensure that, those issues are not addressed just once a year, on the anniversary of resolution 1325. I therefore welcome the renewal of your invitation to the Executive Director of UN Women to provide periodic briefings outside the annual Open Debate cycle.

Finally, engaging women and promoting gender equality as part of our work for peace and security is a daily responsibility and an unfinished mission for all of us. It is time for us to finally recognise the role and power of women to help us build a peaceful world.

Thank you.