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Statement by H.E. Karen Pierce

United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations

at the Security Council Open Debate

on

Women, Peace and Security

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May I join others in thanking the Presidency for holding this open debate on a very important issue.

Women's role in helping to break the conflict cycle is multi-faceted. Legitimate conflict resolution and peacebuilding needs a fully inclusive process. Most importantly however, women's full participation is a question of effectiveness. Women bring important skills and perspectives to the substance of negotiations and to practical peacebuilding efforts on the ground. Peace processes in which women are fully engaged are more likely to generate lasting solutions. And yet, this constituency is often neither represented from amongst the assembled parties during a peace process, nor employed as mediators.

Despite this Council's recognition of the vital role that women can play in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution, the record of women's participation in peace processes since the adoption of resolution 1325 in 2000 is poor. Remarkably, there are currently no women engaged as Special Envoys of the Secretary-General. The Council has very recently reiterated this concern, in its debate last month on mediation. We expect the report that was requested during that debate to address the reasons for this shortfall.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has talked of the challenge to peacebuilding in Liberia in the following terms: "My biggest fear is that a small group might succeed in trying to return us to conflict. It will always remain a fear until we've done enough in responding to the needs of the population". It is clear that mobilising and enabling all available human resources within a country emerging from conflict is key. This means giving women within civil society and government the room to manoeuvre. Giving them a platform from which to engage and the means to make their perspectives heard. And ensuring that they know that they are being listened to. The full engagement of women on the ground, with the direct contribution that they make to the stability of a society, underpins the peacebuilding process. This has been demonstrated in the work of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The international community also needs to better mobilise its resources, human and financial, in support of post-conflict states. At the open debate on post-conflict peacebuilding in May, my Foreign Secretary identified this urgent challenge.

First, he stressed the need to strengthen the international community's ability to offer coordinated and well-managed support to national authorities, in order to ensure a common strategy to drive integrated political, security and development activities. Second, he saw a requirement for increased national and international civilian capacities to plan and implement stabilisation and recovery efforts.

There is a pressing need for capable and talented personnel to fill these staffing and leadership positions. Against this backdrop, women appear to be a largely untapped resource. We hope that this issue will be addressed within the Secretary-General's report on post-conflict peacebuilding that was requested at the May debate.

In 60 years of UN peacekeeping, only 7 women have held the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General. In terms of boots on the ground, a measurement from April this year put the percentage of women military personnel on UN operations at only 1.9%. Yet many militaries, including the UK's and other Troop and Police Contributing Countries, have a much higher percentage of women serving and very many more women in senior command positions. This is not just a question of resources, but also one of effectiveness. There is a rich seam of evidence to show that the presence of deployed women peacekeepers helps to make peacekeeping forces more approachable to a local population and in turn facilitates their work.

So we have to think creatively. Member States have a role to play in ensuring women's full and effective contribution during peace processes, supporting local civil society efforts, deploying more women in support of peace support operations and also in identifying and proposing talented women for senior peacekeeping and peacebuilding positions. In turn, the UN needs to attract the appropriately qualified women from across the globe that we know are out there. This must be done, for the credibility of conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes and to improve the likelihood of their success.