

Protecting women's participation in political and peace processes

Thank you Madam President for convening this debate. On behalf of the United Kingdom, I would like to thank High Commissioner Bachelet, Ms Yaftali and Ms. Asoka for briefing the Council on the realities of women defending and building peace across the globe.

As we've heard today, women human rights defenders and peacebuilders face violence and reprisals because of their goal – building and sustaining peace which is central to the purpose of this Council. These attacks obstruct women's meaningful participation in peace processes. This Council can only operate effectively when it has honest briefing about situations on the ground. Women human rights defenders and peacebuilders who brief the Council provide those insights, and we depend upon them.

We have a duty to protect them and to deal with reprisals effectively. Without adequate protection, violence will continue to serve as a means to silence women's participation. Madam President, only two years ago, this Council committed to ensuring a safe enabling environment for women peacebuilders and civil society, in UN Security Council Resolution 2493.

I would like to offer three areas of practical action:

1. Addressing women's protection in country contexts;
2. Ensuring a safe environment for women human rights defenders;
3. Providing resources and political support to women peacebuilders.

Firstly, women's participation in country contexts. Ms Yaftali spoke movingly about the resilience of Afghan women and girls, despite the violence and discrimination they face. Ensuring Afghan women can safely participate in public life and shape their own futures is the best way to protect the progress achieved on gender equality. The empowerment of women and girls is fundamental to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Secondly, we must safeguard the participation of women in decision-making processes. It is not enough for women to be part of structures and institutions. Their participation must be meaningful.

According to the International Civil Society Action Network's research, enabling environments require the mainstreaming of protection in our WPS policies and practices. Safe environments also depend upon the establishment and support of women's mediator networks, as well as the development of security sector policies that respond to threats of reprisal. Thirdly, we must act in our national capacities and through the UN to provide resources and political support to this agenda.

The UK is wholly committed to preventing and responding to reprisals. Over the past two years we have funded the OHCHR to:

- Develop guidance to prevent reprisals against civil society briefers to the Council
- Strengthen UN engagement with a coalition of Member States to take action against reprisals; and
- Provide field training for UN staff on assisting women peacebuilders at risk of facing reprisals.

We provided over \$300,000 to the Urgent Action Fund to protect and relocate women human rights defenders under threat of reprisals.

We will continue to work closely with peacebuilders and ensure that protection is at the heart of our new National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security.

Madam President, the message from this meeting is clear. We must do everything within our means to protect women's participation in political and peace processes, in countries like Afghanistan and before this very Council.