

Speech: Women, Peace and the Security in the Sahel

Well, thank you very much indeed Minister for being with us again today. It's fantastic to have you here and thank you for all the work Sweden has done on this important dossier. Particularly, for keeping it at the forefront of our minds in the Security Council and the way you have tried to ensure that these issues are properly integrated and that the Security Council and the UN more generally gets out of the silos that we're all familiar with. A huge thank you obviously to Ms. Diop and to the Deputy-Secretary-General for leading this mission. I think it's an incredibly important event. Like other speakers, I think it would be an excellent thing if it were to be regular. As my Dutch colleague said, there are lots of areas of the world that would benefit from your insights and your engagement. You can't be everywhere but I think you've made an incredibly good start on this occasion.

I was particularly interested in the assessment of the level of women's participation in decision making and in peace and development processes and I was struck by the same comment about "prefer not to be raped" as my Dutch colleague but I think even more than that was the interest shown by the people you talk to in producing more female candidates. And I think if we had only one thing we could concentrate on, to build that pipeline for the future and to start changing behaviours through governments, I think will be definitely worth thinking further about.

I'd like to say at the outset, Madam President, that we in the UK fully share your goal of having full delivery of [Resolution] 1325 by 2020. So you can count on Britain to work with you here and in Geneva at the United Nations to realize that. I think as other speakers have hinted, the question of women's economic empowerment and their enjoyment of human rights and their role within their families and communities is something that needs to be nurtured and curated. And this is not just a moral issue. This is an economic issue. It's a prosperity issue. Those countries will thrive who properly make use of and develop all the talents of their people. And I think the Kazakh Ambassador set it out very well when he talked about the link between security and development. So we do everyone a favour by intensifying this link between women's participation in economic life and the foundation of peace and security.

And from our perspective, we would like to see even more effort be dedicated to integrating a gender perspective in strategies including those about countering violent extremism and we would like to see more women's involvement in policy planning – so right at the ground floor and I think that was one of the conclusions of the Informal Expert Group on Women Peace and Security in June.

We heard a lot yesterday in the Children in Armed Conflict debate about the stigma of women returnees being disproportionately targeted when they go back to their communities and I think that's just worth putting on the table again

today. It would be very good to hear from the countries themselves what can be done to address that particular issue.

Specifically on the Sahel, the United Kingdom is increasing our regional presence in the Sahel. We opened a mission in Chad in March this year. Chad and Niger sadly sit at the bottom, as I understand it, of the gender equality index and that's why we in the UK want to do more to help those colleagues develop women's empowerment. And I think the efforts that the Security Council, the U.N. system, the African Union and the G5 themselves have undertaken so far to ensure that we can fine-tune adequate measures to empower women is a very good step forward.

From our perspective, we concentrate a lot on providing reproductive health services to displaced populations and refugees and we are prioritising access to voluntary family planning for future support. We spend a lot of our programme funds on climate and environment resilience in eastern Chad and the BRACED program commits to 50 percent women beneficiaries and includes the component on gender-based violence. So I think all those things are contributing, I hope, to what we're talking about today.

We also have a partnership with France arising out of the Anglo-French summit in January to work on gender within the Alliance Sahel; supporting greater mainstreaming on gender across the work of that alliance and if there are other colleagues in the United Nations who would like to know more about that, or even contribute with us, we've been very happy to work with other colleagues on that.

You, Madam President, particularly mentioned education and girls education and again we spoke about that yesterday under the heading of Children in Armed Conflict. I'd just like to highlight that in the Sahel millions of children and youth are out of school, thanks to the presence of terrorist groups, the militias; the conflict between farmers and herders; the difficult economic situation experienced by many families; and of course girls are particularly affected. Sometimes it's because of very basic things like schools lacking hygiene facilities to accommodate the particular needs of girls. The Sahel region, as we heard, has one of the highest rates of child, early and forced marriage in the world. So, the barriers to girls enjoying a proper education are very severe. The United Kingdom therefore has been concentrating on what we call the Girls Education Challenge and it is already working to support 1.5 million girls achieve a quality education. We are one of the largest donors to 'Education Cannot Wait' which Chad is one of the four initial investment countries. So, I just wanted to give a snapshot, Madam President, of some of the things we've been doing but to say how much we share your view that this is an absolutely critical part of being able to embed peace, security and stability in an important region. Thank you.