

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Orzala Ashraf Nemat
At the UN Security Council Open Debate
on Women, Peace and Security
28th October 2011**

Madame President, Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

I would like to thank Nigeria, the President of the Security Council, for the invitation to speak here today. I have the honor of speaking on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, a coalition of international civil society organizations that advocates for the equal and full participation of women in all efforts to maintain international peace and security.¹ And personally, as a long-time advocate for the rights of women in Afghanistan, I am delighted to share this high-level table with you.

Madame President,

As the UN Secretary-General has reported, we have seen some progress in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, particularly within the UN system. The establishment of UN Women, once adequately funded, and with advice from women's human rights defenders, offers governments and civil society new possibilities for effectively advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. Also, the increased Women, Peace and Security references in UN reports and mandate renewals by the UN Security Council are most welcome. So too is the Security Council's adoption in December 2010 of resolution 1960 on Women Peace and Security, focused on strengthening the prevention of, and response to, conflict-related sexual violence.

However, we also agree with the Secretary-General, that implementation remains far from even. This is particularly the case regarding implementation of the number one provision in Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, namely, (quote), the "increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict" (end quote).

The theme of this Open Debate is therefore particularly timely. As I know from experience in Afghanistan, women are crucial to all efforts to create and maintain peace and security, and there are examples from around the world – in Liberia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Yemen, Guatemala, Northern Ireland, and in many others – which demonstrate that women can be effective leaders in conflict prevention and in all aspects of peacebuilding. Nevertheless, we continue to face political and practical barriers to exercising our right to full and meaningful participation in every peace process. It is particularly frustrating that we are repeatedly marginalized, despite the many national and international commitments already made to include us at the decision-making table.

Madame President, there are three urgent steps that the UN and its Member States must take:
Increasing women's role in the **prevention of conflict**; Fulfilling women's right to participate fully in

decisions regarding the future of their countries, including in **peace processes**; and Ensuring women's **equal rights are fundamental in peace accords** and all political settlements.

As to the first step - Increasing women's role in the prevention of conflict:

The most effective way to ensure peace and security for all is, of course, by preventing conflict. Too often, however, national and international efforts to do so ignore, or worse undermine, the important work women are already doing in their communities to address root causes of conflict .

In looking for ways to effectively prevent conflict, national and international authorities should ask us women what lessons we have already learned and what recommendations we have, for addressing root causes of conflict. And, for us to continue and increase our work in conflict prevention, we need your support in ensuring our safety, and ensuring independent investigations into any attacks on us, the effective control of arms transfers, and sustained funding for the development of our programmes.

Secondly, Fulfilling women's right to participate fully in decisions regarding the future of their countries, including in peace processes:

It is vital women in conflict-affected areas are fully able to exercise their equal rights to shape their country's future. The UN and its Member States have repeatedly expressed a commitment to this principle. However, there has been little to no sense of urgency in seeing this through. A commitment to women's equal and full participation requires our immediate involvement in the drafting and negotiating of all peace agreements and in the reform of relevant political, security and justice institutions.

The next 12 months will, for example, see new elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, continuing political transition in the Middle and North Africa, and ongoing efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan. In all such situations, we strongly urge you to support the full participation of women in constitutional and legislative reform, to support women political candidates, and to provide safe environments for women to fully exercise their rights in electoral processes.

The development of women's leadership in peace processes must be promoted at the local, national, and international level. To ensure the voices of the most marginalized are heard in these processes, the efforts of women's groups to strengthen the links between communities and national level negotiations requires greater investment and protection.

There is an important connection between high-level political commitment and its translation to the field level. For example, in Afghanistan, when we asked for protection for women provincial candidates, central authorities immediately agreed to provide this protection. However, when the candidates approached the **local** authorities, the women and their security concerns were dismissed and mocked, and told that such protection would be a waste of resources.

Third, ensuring women's equal rights are fundamental to peace accords and all political settlements:

It is frustrating to see that full recognition of all rights are **still** not consistently included in peace talks and in peace accords, and that there appears to be little sense of urgency to improve this. In too many cases, as was the case in Sudan in 2005, even when women are included in peace talks, their rights are neglected in the accords.

Excellencies, this Open Debate today is focused on the matter of our security. When Afghan women were asked their definition of security, we used the word “*amnyat wamasuniat*”, by which we mean a comprehensive feeling of safety when engaged in daily public and social life. The success of peace agreements must be gauged by real, measurable security improvements for women and for all members of the community, not just that a peace agreement has been signed.

Excellencies, peace is a process, not an event.

We look to you as Member States, including members of the Security Council, to ensure that women are consistently appointed as mediators and negotiators, and that our rights are fundamental to peace processes and outcomes. We have seen the difference women make when they are involved in conflict prevention and resolution, highlighted most recently in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to women from Liberia and Yemen for this work.

Madame President, in conclusion, I would like emphasize that women, especially in conflict-affected situations should not be considered victims, but rather we should be duly recognized as powerful agents of change.

Thank you.

ⁱ The NGOWG serves as a bridge between women’s human rights defenders working in conflict-affected situations and policy-makers at UN Headquarters, and is comprised of Amnesty International; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Femmes Africa Solidarité; Global Action to Prevent War; Global Justice Center; Human Rights Watch; The Institute for Inclusive Security; International Action Network on Small Arms; International Alert; International Rescue Committee; Refugees International; International Women’s Program of the Open Society Foundations; Social Science Research Council; United Methodist Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries – United Methodist Church; Women’s Refugee Commission; Women’s Action for New Directions; Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.