

Madam President, Excellencies, Civil Society colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. My name is Assitan Diallo, and I am President of Association des Femmes Africaines pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFARD-Mali), a non-governmental organization that promotes the rights of women in Mali. I speak to you today from a country that has suffered from bloody conflict since 2012, but that has been wracked by violence and instability for much of the last decade. As I have learned from my own work, women and young people have paid the highest price for war.

My statement today will focus on three key issues:

- 1) Access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence;
- 2) Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security; and
- 3) Ensuring that MINUSMA and G5 Sahel are able to respond to the security needs of our communities.

Access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence

As has been well-documented, gang rapes, early and forced marriages, as well as abductions of women and girls for the purpose of sexual slavery are part of a broad pattern of gender-based violence (GBV) in Mali. To date, and as documented by the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, no perpetrators of the sexual violence carried out during the crisis in 2012 and 2013 have been held accountable and complaints filed on behalf of 115 victims remain pending; only about 10 to 20 per cent of women and girls who have suffered GBV have access to protection and judicial assistance. However, despite the overwhelming evidence, none of the key players - not the authorities nor the armed groups who are signatories to the 2015 Bamako Agreement, nor the international community - have done enough to ensure justice for the women and young people who face such abuse on a daily basis. The prevailing insecurity in regions such as Northern and Central Mali is currently preventing judicial authorities from returning to the areas where some of them have been kidnapped, tortured or killed. In addition, armed groups seek to undermine fundamental human rights obligations by upholding religious law at the local level, which would undermine state secularism while jeopardizing real justice for survivors of GBV.

Ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security

There can be no peace or development in Mali without gender equality. Despite the legal requirement of 30% representation of women in all processes and institutions that support the implementation of the Bamako Agreement, this quota is far from being filled.

In addition, the ongoing DDR and SSR processes must be gender-sensitive and include equal representation of women in order to ensure that their needs and experiences are taken into account. The current under-representation of women in the G5 Sahel's defence and security structures prevents Malian women from fully contributing to peace and security in the region.

Finally, the inclusion and active engagement of women, particularly young women, is especially important to meaningfully address the risk that marginalized and disenfranchised young people turn to violence.

Ensuring MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel Joint Force are responsive to the current situation in Mali

There is widespread frustration with MINUSMA's inability to effectively protect civilians, and a prevailing sense of insecurity, despite the presence of UN and regional forces. Youth attacks on the MINUSMA camps in Gao and the refusal of a district in Bamako to allow the G5 Sahel Joint Force to establish its headquarters there out of fear they would become targets of violence speak to the people's lack of confidence in international forces. It is clear that MINUSMA's presence does not make people feel secure.

Additionally, both MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel Joint Force are mandated to mainstream gender across all aspects of their work; MINUSMA must now do more to address the gender dimension of security, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force must ensure that its recently established women's platform is able to robustly address women's rights across the Sahel region.

Deep marginalisation, inequality and poverty are the root causes of the current conflict and compound the pervasive insecurity in Mali. To address them, MINUSMA must provide stronger support to the government to enable it to deliver necessary public services to communities in need and to ensure security in the long-term. This requires ongoing political dialogue with all armed groups, active involvement of civil society and support by the UN and other international actors. While MINUSMA's neutrality is critical to its core mandate, most Malians also want to see MINUSMA effectively protecting civilians and ensuring their security.

Finally, as has been previously noted in reports of the Secretary-General and by speakers to this Council, the militarization of the Sahel is doing nothing to establish peace in the region and cannot come at the expense of the safety of the local population, who too often get caught in the middle of operations. This only feeds cycles of violence and mistrust, and makes dialogue more difficult.

Madam President, in conclusion, I call on the Security Council to:

- Encourage the Government of Mali to promote inclusion in SSR and DDR processes, and to ensure that these processes have robust oversight mechanisms to deter corruption and abuse
- Hold the leadership of MINUSMA and G5 Sahel Joint Force accountable for effectively protecting civilians and mainstreaming gender across all of their operations
- Continue to pressure the Government to ensure the 30% quota for women's participation in all processes and institutions related to peace and security
- Continue to call on the Government to ensure access to justice for victims of all crimes, including survivors of GBV
- Ensure consultation with women, youth and other civil society actors on all aspects of peace and security

Madam President, the solution to the complex dynamics of the current conflict in Mali will not be found on the battlefield but must come from dialogue and responding to the concerns of ordinary people. I urge you today, as members of the Security Council, to use your power to ensure that this occurs.

Thank you.