

**U.S. Federation for Middle East Peace:
“Women in Conflict and Post Conflict Situations”**

New York, 10 March 2015

**Remarks by
H.E. Katalin Bogyay
Permanent Representative of Hungary**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

*"Peace is Action, Not Words."
Betty Williams, Northern Ireland, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 1977*

Each century has its defining moral issue. If slavery was the towering moral issue of the 19th century, the fight against totalitarianism dominated the 20th century. The rights of women and the struggle to uphold them in every corner of the world will be the moral imperative of the 21st century.

We are all born peacemakers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cause of empowering women to take leading roles in the positive social transformations towards peace and sustainable development is especially close to my heart.

The innate horror of the idea to lose our sons in a war or have our daughters widowed motivates us to look for new and positive ways to bridge the differences, to find mutually acceptable situations and arrive to win-win solutions.

Time and again, determined not to see their country slide back into conflict, women have proven their tremendous potential to foster peace, nurture reconciliation and contribute to sustainable development of their communities. And yet, the potential contribution of women to peace and security remains severely undervalued.

According to available data on recent peace negotiations, women - despite of having contributed in many informal ways to conflict resolution - represented only fewer than 8% of participants to peace negotiations and fewer than 3% of signatories of peace treaties. I would like to see women appointed chief or lead mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks. Their exclusion invariably leads to the failure of adequately addressing women's concerns in the context of peace and reconciliation. We should do more to harness women's potential for reconciliation at the highest levels of governance.

The inclusion of women in peace talks is not only a basic democratic right, but is also essential to building sustainable peace. By letting half of the population's voice being unheard, it is impossible to build societies based on inclusion and justice.

Fortunately, the international community is putting more and more emphasis on the need to include women representatives in peace-making processes, like the examples

of establishing quotas for women at the negotiation tables in Afghanistan, Yemen or Libya show. Yet, more needs to be done in this regard, and we should not let women's voices to be lost after the signature of peace treaties either.

Leadership is often defined within the sphere of politics, but many women are already very active in civil society and are engaged in peacebuilding, driving reconciliation, and preventing conflicts at the community level. Building on this, the international community must more to support these local movements, encourage women to take up leading roles and create space for them to engage in politics at all levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should not neglect the enormous potential that women hold to foster peace and reconciliation, and think of the ways in which we, the United Nations, can empower them to realize this potential for the betterment of humanity.

The answer is innovation and education

For me, the answer lies in innovation; innovation in thinking, innovation in changing attitudes, innovation in acting to rectify gender imbalances.

We cannot underestimate the important role education plays for women and girls affected by armed conflict. First and foremost, education provides girls with the tools to protect themselves from gender-based violence. Improving girls' access to education is also one of the key tools to prevent child marriage. By providing unhindered access to education and development of skills, women and girls are better equipped to participate in conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding.

As Malala Yousafzai so eloquently put it: "Let us pick up our books and our pens, they are the most powerful weapons."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Hungary's Permanent Representative, I must add that Hungary strongly recognizes and values the power and unique skills of women in peace and development. Empowering women by investing in their education, strengthening their leadership capacities, as well as engaging them in decision-making are in each society's best interest. This is especially relevant in places where peace has broken down and conflict has shifted focus away from cooperation towards division and hatred. Rather than seeing women as victims of armed conflicts, more has to be done to promote their full and equal participation in all stages of peace processes.

For the above reasons, the Hungarian Government congratulates the Secretary-General for choosing the empowerment of women and children as one of his priorities for 2015.

Violent extremism is a shocking fact

In his latest annual report, the Secretary General gave a detailed account of the horrific crimes committed by ISIL, including reports of rape, mass abduction, forced marriage, forced prostitution and stoning of women for alleged adultery. The primary targets of these horrendous crimes were women and girls belonging to religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis and other faiths.

According to the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, ISIS believes in the subordinate role of women in society. They tell women what to wear, how to act, who to marry.

They even set up the so-called Al-Hisbah morality police, as well as the all-female brigade, Al-Khans'aa for monitoring adherence to dress codes and enforcing punishments. ISIS has executed women for unapproved contact with the opposite sex. Just like in the Middle Ages, they stoned them to death. They beheaded a female dentist, Dayr Az-Zawr, only because she continued to treat patients of both sexes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even more shocking for me is that, although we rarely talk about it, women may also be active supporters of radical ideologies. In practice, we see more and more evidence proving that women support terrorism by maintaining safe houses, by gathering intelligence, or even by committing suicide bombing.

According to some studies, the percentage of women and girls in separatist groups is already around 30-40%. Terrorist groups like ISIL successfully manipulate women and young girls too. Therefore, in my opinion, counter terrorism policies and measures will be effective only if they also take into account these gender sensitive factors. The evil is taking over the soul of women too. Now, this is real extremism for me.

Women play a significant role in the political changes

Women are often seen solely as the victims of violent conflicts, but this picture is misleading: women play an indispensable role in solving conflicts and ensuring lasting peace when they are organized as part of the civil society.

Women can play positive preventative roles during conflict situations - let us just think about their efforts to protect their families from turning to radicalization and the use of violence - and act as agents of peace and dialogue in post-conflict situations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the days of CSW, we are celebrating women. Let this be an occasion when women of all continents and all countries, regardless of the national boundaries and the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together, look back and celebrate the history of their heroic struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

And let us use this opportunity to send a message to hundreds of millions of women and girls whose voices and hopes are currently unheard that we will do everything possible to ensure their bright future - future in which they can aim high and realize their dreams.

It is an imperative to talk clearly and loudly about the vulnerability of women in conflict zones and the need for a much stronger role of women in conflict prevention and resolution.

Thank you for your attention.