

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
4 October 2022

Original: English

Letter dated 4 October 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Gabon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of October 2022, Gabon will convene a Security Council debate on women and peace and security on the theme “Strengthening women’s resilience and leadership as a path to peace in regions plagued by armed groups”.

In order to guide the discussions on the topic, Gabon has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michel Xavier **Biang**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 4 October 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Gabon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on women and peace and security on the theme “Strengthening women’s resilience and leadership as a path to peace in regions plagued by armed groups”, Thursday, 20 October 2022, at 10 a.m.

Objective

1. During its presidency of the Security Council, Gabon will convene an open debate on the theme “Strengthening women’s resilience and leadership as a path to peace in regions plagued by armed groups”.
2. The meeting is an opportunity for all Member States to share specific examples of how they are supporting women’s resilience in conflict-affected countries and their capacity to contribute to peace and security.
3. The presidency will collect some of the highlights, best practices and any new concrete commitments to advancing the women and peace and security agenda in a Chair’s summary.

Background

4. The Security Council has convened four meetings on women and peace and security in 2022: on attacks against women human rights defenders in conflict-affected countries, on women’s economic empowerment and the role of the private sector, on conflict-related sexual violence, and on the importance of regional organizations in advancing the women and peace and security agenda. In all of these meetings, Council members reiterated supportive statements about the incalculable potential and promising dividends of supporting gender equality and women’s leadership but also acknowledged the present-day reality of underinvestment and persisting implementation gaps.
5. For example, on International Women’s Day, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Sima Bahous, lamented that, instead of renewed international cooperation and collective investment in science, health and social protection for all, especially women and girls, the world had seen rising military spending and the proliferation of conflicts. Studies show that investing in women’s economic empowerment yields enormous dividends for both peace and prosperity, but exclusion and discrimination continue to keep women away from employment, land, property, inheritance, credit and technology: all the tools that they need to improve a country’s chance of preventing conflicts or recovering from them. The Security Council celebrates and applauds the resilience of sexual violence survivors and the organizations that fight for their rights and justice, but sexual violence increased again last year, and the few landmark cases of gender justice contrast with a backdrop of thousands of United Nations-verified cases. Similarly, the Council is aware of the important role that women’s organizations play in conflict-affected countries and of how quickly they adjust to unfolding crises to meet the needs of their communities. The Council has heard this from many of the women directly, as 62 women from civil society were invited to Council meetings in 2021 alone, and the Council is on track to invite a similar number in 2022. And yet, only 0.3 per cent of bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected countries goes to women’s organizations.

6. In June 2022, the Secretary-General told the Security Council that gender equality offered a path to sustainable peace and conflict, and yet we are moving in the opposite direction. This includes potential reversals in generational gains for gender equality and a corresponding impact on international peace and security. But while descriptions of current trends often include worrisome trends in relation to the impact of conflict on women's health, education, food security, participation in public life, and their rights in general, it is equally important that the international community pay attention to the multiple ways in which women and women's organizations are organizing themselves, and joining up in ever-growing networks, to contribute to peace and security. Despite the odds, women peacebuilders are persisting in their determination to help their communities and fight for their rights. This remains true even in contexts in which the proliferation of armed groups has increased insecurity for everyone, brought drastic changes to the lives of women and girls and contributed to the uncontrolled and illicit spread of small arms and light weapons, which in turn lead to further violence against women and girls.

7. We can see examples of this resilience in many ways, whether in resisting denials of girls' right to education or crossing front lines to deliver aid and negotiate humanitarian access, or in their outsized role in building community cohesion and recovery after violence and conflict. We see it both in the growth of transnational networks of women leaders, across regions and sometimes entire continents, such as in Africa, and in the coverage and activities of local women mediators, preventing conflict at all levels. We see it in the way that women leaders and activists have not accepted their exclusion from decision-making and negotiating rooms, often finding alternative ways to make their voices heard. We see it in their tireless advocacy to hold accountable those who perpetrate gender-based crimes, no matter how much time goes by and how much impunity pervades their communities. We see it in women's campaigns to silence the guns and stop their proliferation in their communities. Finally, we see it in women's presence among first responders to aid their neighbours and their communities as well as those most vulnerable, even amid the rubble and devastation.

8. For resilience to make a difference, it needs to be supported. This ranges from political support to material support for women's networks and women peacebuilders to specific interventions to provide basic services to women and their families, including mental health and psychosocial support. This support is critical to help survivors to keep fighting, overcome trauma and invisible wounds and contribute to the collective well-being. While mental health and psychosocial support have long been recognized as crucial building blocks for individual and collective resilience, these interventions are still often overlooked and neglected.

9. In the context of increasing conflict and proliferation of armed groups, it is more important than ever that the international community draw inspiration and hope from women's resilience and pay attention to their activism for peace. But beyond that, the Security Council and the rest of the Member States are urged to reward the courage of women leaders with their trust and support, buttress the strength of women's civil society organizations and networks and invest in women's resilience in conflict-affected countries as a path to greater peace and security for all.

Guiding questions

10. The following questions will guide the debate, and we encourage Member States to address them in their statements.

- What are the best examples of your country's support for women's leadership and resilience for the purpose of conflict prevention and recovery over the past year, in particular in contexts with a growing presence of armed groups?

- What plans does your Government have to advance women and peace and security and support women's resilience in the coming months?
- What are some ways in which the Security Council and the United Nations – including country teams and peace operations in conflict-affected countries – can better support women's resilience and leadership and address the proliferation of armed groups and small arms and light weapons that have such a negative impact on the lives of women and girls?
- How can Member States reverse negative trends and help to advance the women and peace and security agenda in general, with due consideration of the goals of the Secretary-General for the decade?

Participation, format and expected outcome

11. The open debate will be chaired at the ministerial level. All participating members of the Security Council are encouraged to deliver succinct statements focused on specific examples, achievements, commitments and solutions.
 12. The Security Council will be briefed by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women and two women from civil society.
 13. After the briefings and the statements of Security Council members, all Member States will be invited to deliver a statement, lasting no more than four minutes. The President will prepare a Chair's summary of the debate and share it with all participants.
 14. Inscription for the open debate will open on Monday, 17 October 2022, at 9.30 a.m., through the e-deleGATE portal.
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