



Security Council Arrria-Formula Meeting
“Call to Lead by Example: Ensuring the Full, Equal and Meaningful
Participation of Women in UN-led Peace Processes”

Statement by H.E. Mohan Peiris,
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Madam Chair, permit me to first thank and congratulate the co-chairs Mexico and Ireland for putting in place this initiative to discuss the participation of women in UN-led peace processes, on a very important day when we celebrate “International Women’s Day”.

We have all heard many times and know for a fact that violations of human rights in most conflict affected communities, disproportionately affect women and children. In situations of heightened violence and insecurity, women are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population, they may even experience such violations from within the family itself, in addition to existing discrimination in society. We know that this has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Last year, was a pivotal year for advancing gender equality where we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, considered the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women’s rights, the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the 5 year milestone in the path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. While recognizing that vital steps have been taken by the global community towards achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, we know that challenges and obstacles remain that stall the socio-economic and political development of women.

I must however hasten to remind ourselves of the salutary message by our Commissioner for Human Rights Madam Bachelet who had this to say: “The Beijing Platform for action was nothing short of revolutionary. We should always celebrate it, but we must remind ourselves that the Beijing Agenda is unfinished. The risk for setbacks are real and growing.” She went onto say “we must resist the challenges to the hard won affirmation of what we know; women’s rights are human rights and they are not negotiable. Human dignity cannot be dissected, compartmentalized, compromised - nor can it be a privilege of the few.”

I am also reminded of the words of Malala Yousafzai who said, and I quote “I raise my voice not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back” unquote. This surely must be the reason that 20 years since the adoption of the WPS Agenda we still feel that women are being held back. What can we do to accelerate this process? How can we ensure the enhanced leadership and participation of women in peace processes and political engagements?

We commend the Secretary-General for the leadership that he has taken to improve the gender parity at the UN, particularly at the senior leaders level and amongst the UN Resident Coordinators. In UN field missions, women's leadership is at 41%. Sri Lanka will continue to support the Secretary-General in his endeavors to push for gender parity at all levels.

Madam Chairperson, Sri Lanka is proud to have a long association with United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, having served as a member of the 1956 Advisory Committee that led to the establishment of the first "classical" peacekeeping mission – UNEF 1, deployed during the Suez crisis and later deployed as UN Peacekeepers to the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) in 1960. Having engaged in a humanitarian struggle with a terrorist organization that used human shields, suicide bombers and child soldiers, Sri Lanka's armed forces and Police have been sharing expertise in handling difficult and complex terrains of the humanitarian engagement field, in difficult areas of the world.

Since then, with over 20,000 Sri Lankan Peacekeepers, having served in UN Peace Missions across the world providing critical services to conflict affected communities in the most difficult and dangerous terrains, they are widely recognized for their valor and capabilities and appreciated by the UN Peacekeeping Missions they serve in. Over the years, Sri Lanka has consistently made efforts to encourage women peacekeepers and currently we have 12 women peacekeepers serving in South Sudan. We believe that women peacekeepers improve overall peacekeeping performance, have greater access to communities, help in promoting human rights and protection of civilians and encourage women to become a meaningful part of peace and political processes.

As Kathy Calvin the former President and CEO of UN Foundation put it "We should rededicate ourselves to ensuring that every girl is educated, healthy, skilled and empowered. Investing in their today is investing in our tomorrow." Let us pledge today to do much more than pay lip service to all these ideals but work towards real change for the women of the world to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for the continued existence of mankind.

While it is useful to share the experience among the international community on the obstacles faced by women and the prescriptions needed to alleviate from such setbacks, we must be sensitive to the diverse situations and circumstances, in which the proposed programs and strategies have to be implemented. The role of women in society is different in varied cultures and as such a one-size fits all policy cannot be applied in the pursuance of their rights. It is imperative for policies in this regard to be formulated, in tandem with domestic compulsions and requirements.

Madam Chairperson, let us continue to remain cognizant of the invaluable contribution of women to the social, economic and political development of countries and reaffirm our commitment towards consistent and sustainable pro-equality and pro-empowerment policies for women conducive to the local contexts. As a global community we must not deter from this path and ensure that voices once unheard will be heard loud and clear.

Thank you.