

61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Statement by Ms. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

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1. Mr. Chair, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to convey my gratitude for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to also thank H.E. Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota of Brazil for Chairing the Bureau of the 61st session of the CSW this year, as well as the Vice-Chairs for their work in ensuring the success of the this Commission.
 2. My name is Sharon Bhagwan Rolls and I am the Executive Producer and Director of femLINKpacific, a feminist media organization that advocates for women as decision makers in the long-term transformation of Fiji. However, I will also be delivering this statement as the Chair of the International Steering Group of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, which works in collaboration with the World Federalist Movement and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect to build the capacity of civil society actors to influence intergovernmental and regional organisations, state actors, civil society and other conflict stakeholders to create, improve, and implement conflict prevention mechanisms and norms, in ways that are locally-grounded and inclusive.
 3. First, I would like to applaud the Commission for its continuous work throughout the last 61 years in empowering women, promoting women's rights, monitoring the daily realities of women's lives from here in New York to the local level of indigenous women around the world, as well as helping to influence the standards for gender equality globally. Since the Commission's conception in 1946, the progress that has been made in advancing the position of women and girls in every region is highly commendable. However, as I am sure those in this room are most aware, there is still much to be done, especially in ensuring women's equal and meaningful participation in society, and in peace processes not only globally, or nationally, but also locally.
 4. As a media professional, I utilize content development and distribution to enable and empower community media production to increase the visibility of diverse women's viewpoints and realities, especially those of rural and young women in the Pacific region. During Fiji's second political coup in 2000, as Secretary of the National Council of Women Fiji, I coordinated the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil and the Women's Action for Democracy and Peace. It is notable that "The Blue Ribbon" was first used by the women's peace vigil, but it has continued to stand as a symbol for the further empowerment of women and the strengthening of women's active participation in peace and security decision-making, which includes working to advancement of the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. To this day, the Fiji blue ribbon remains a steadfast representation of a unified front in support of peace and reconciliation, as well as the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy.
 5. Our Prevention Up Front Alliance reaffirms key recommendations from the Global Study of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that a strategy of prevention, including in economic development will also ensure the non-recurrence of future conflict. The results of risks to peace and security are felt throughout populations, particularly as genocide and other atrocity crimes disproportionately affect women and girls at an alarming rate as they often are directly targeted and also bear the brunt of the economic and social consequences of such crimes. However, women are not just victims of conflict and atrocities; they have a vital role to play in the

implementation and advancement of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) and human security, as well as an inherent right to participate in conflict prevention and resolution processes. Understanding the mutual linkages between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and exploring how existing efforts may address the risks associated with atrocities is essential for a more informed and effective approach to prevention. For instance, policies violating women's rights are often indicators of or can amount to atrocity crimes. Empowering women is essential in recognizing early warning signs and preventing atrocities, especially for indigenous women in remote areas of the world, where governments or traditional civil society representatives may not have access.

6. We know that in post conflict societies, violence and security concerns peak especially with regard to women and children and that too often in post-conflict situations the poverty and discrimination that first led to conflict often just remain unaddressed. Unless one deals with these structural issues along with individual projects that empower individuals, society and women will not really emerge from repeated cycles of conflict. Furthermore, the impact of women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes has been proven to improve the probability for sustainable peace and support the strengthening of resiliency across communities. The proactive domestic translation into policies and mechanisms of the Women, Peace and Security agenda will help institutionalize this aspiration.
7. Development programs also provide an often overlooked, yet integral part in preventing conflict and empowering women and girls. That is why, in response to the theme for CSW61, women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, and considering the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls noted in the agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session, we believe it is vital to ensure that women's definitions of economic security are taken into account and amplified through appropriate and accessible information and communication systems.
8. This means there is a need for strong alignment to and accountability of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to women's human rights treaties, including CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 in particular, to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, including by ensuring public access to information through accessible and appropriate information and communication systems, such as women-led media and information networks. Media freedom is a key issue for an informed, inclusive and peaceful society and community media is vital to ensure that local media make the realities of women of all diversities visible.
9. Central to the prevention and WPS agendas is sustained partnership with the media and civil society. Such actors are instrumental in the implementation of preventive measures, ranging from locally structured initiatives through to early warning and advocacy at the international level. We call for governance systems which ensure a free and independent media to analyze the progress or the lack of progress on the SDGs and balance the scale between those with political power and the communities that they represent; enabling the participation of women in decision-making; and eliminating the stereotypes when portraying women in media.
10. Finally, from my own Pacific Island region, I amplify the call of feminist sisters in particular the We Rise Coalition that progressing the gender equality and women's human rights agenda requires building and sustaining women's collective power through movements because it has been and will continue to be women's movements that turn individual efforts into a political force for change that cannot be ignored.
11. Thank you, Mr. Chair.