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Intervention at

Arria-formula meeting on *Call to Lead by Example: Ensuring the Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation of Women in UN-led Peace Processes*

New York, 8/03/2021

Madam President,

My delegation supports many of the points raised by colleagues before us: indeed, we have only heard arguments for the inclusion of more women in peace negotiations. We also appreciate the testimonies of the rapporteurs, particularly that of Mrs. Jarhum and Mrs. Hinds.

I would like to emphasize four points:

1. If we want women to participate equally in public life, we need to address the **structural obstacles facing women and girls**. We can achieve this by dismantling discriminatory laws, investing more in girls' education, ensuring that women and girls are free from gender-based violence, have equal economic and political opportunities, can make free decisions about their bodies and family planning, and have access to social protection.
2. Throughout history, many women and girls have demonstrated what they are capable of, but **often patriarchal norms and stereotypes persist**. We need to address gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. The media, including social media, has an important role as a catalyst for positive role models and messages about women's leadership.
3. We often have high expectations of the few women negotiators in current peace processes: we expect them to be able to somehow represent all women in a conflict. It is imperative that we **include young women, women from different regions, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities and LGBTI+ people**. For example, UNAMA has a mandate to support and engage with various women's groups. **Monitoring** should be undertaken to determine the extent to which the power brokers leading the peace process are taking concrete steps to ensure that the expertise and priorities of diverse Afghan women are taken into account, including preserving all constitutional protections of women's human rights.

4. Finally, I want to recognize the **work and achievements of civil society organizations, women human rights defenders, women journalists and women's networks**. They play an essential role in achieving progress and deserve our recognition, support, including financial support, and protection. This is why Belgium is proud to support the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

If the UN cannot set an example, we cannot expect the same from others. Belgium fully supports the Secretary-General in his call for action to adopt a feminist approach and accelerate the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes. Belgium is one of the countries that asked the United Nations, in October last year, to work to ensure that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women becomes a requirement in all mediation teams, political transitions and peace processes.

Madam President, we are a few days away from the beginning of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will discuss the participation of women in public life. We call on all Member States to heed the Secretary-General's call for a feminist approach to peace processes.

Thank you.