

**UNSC Open Arria Formula Meeting**

**24/01/2019, 3:00pm, Trusteeship Chamber**

**« What's next for Women, Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa: the potential of National Action Plans »**

Mr. President,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the missions of Germany, Peru and the United Kingdom for giving us the opportunity to exchange ideas on the potential of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the Middle East and North Africa. I would also like to thank Asa Regner, Suzan Aref and Lea Baroudi for their engaging briefings. Belgium fully aligns itself with the European Union statement.

I had the opportunity to meet Nobel Peace Prize Winner Ms Nadia Murad and I am fully aware of how important the Women, Peace and Security agenda is for all countries, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. I therefore wish to congratulate the League of Arab States for adopting a Regional Action Plan already in 2015, as well as the countries in the region that adopted National Action Plans.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a priority for Belgium. Mon pays a adopté, en juillet 2017, son troisième Plan d'action national Femmes, Paix et Sécurité. Ce plan fixe six objectifs majeurs destinés à améliorer la situation des femmes dans les zones de (pré-/post-) conflit. Today, I will elaborate on three of them :

**First**, I would like to stress the importance of the **equal and meaningful participation** of women in all processes relating to conflict, peace and security. All too often, important decisions within the context of peace processes are taken by groups composed exclusively of men, thereby

ignoring half of the population, sidelining the specific needs of women and reducing the chances of success and sustainable peace.

For example, in Yemen, women should not merely be included in an advisory capacity, as is the case with the Women's Technical Advisory Group. Their voices should be heard in the political process and Yemeni women should be able to participate in an equal and meaningful way throughout the peace process to achieve an inclusive political solution for the country. A future National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for Yemen could, for instance, codify this commitment and reinforce the important work Yemeni women have led to advance their position. The international community has a critical part to play in supporting their efforts and ensuring their meaningful inclusion, not as a courtesy to women, but as a necessity for achieving sustainable peace in Yemen.

**Second**, more needs to be done for the **prevention and protection** against all forms of **violence** against women and girls, in particular sexual violence. The MENA region has seen some of the worst forms of sexual and gender-based violence, with women and girls from minorities being used as slaves by ISIS in Iraq and many young girls forced into early marriage in Libya, Syria and Yemen. NAPs should seek to protect women and girls from these atrocities by developing adequate legislation as well as mechanisms to monitor and document cases, by facilitating women's access to justice and ensuring accountability and end impunity for sexual violence, including against children.

The **third** aspect I would like to highlight is the importance of ensuring access to appropriate multi-disciplinary services to victims of conflict-related violence. This entails **comprehensive assistance** based on psychological, social and medical support, including sexual and reproductive health services. Special attention should be paid to the particularly vulnerable

situation of displaced women and the complex gendered needs in humanitarian response.

Mr. President, Ladies and gentlemen,

Nearly 80 states now have a National Action Plan on WPS. In light of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSC resolution 1325 in 2020, I sincerely hope this will inspire other countries to follow soon. Belgium stands ready to share its experience in this field.

As we commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CEDAW-convention this year. I would like to underline the key role this instrument plays in the elimination of discrimination and violence against women. Of particular relevance to the Women Peace Security-agenda, is the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. 189 states have ratified CEDAW, which can be considered a success. Unfortunately, a relatively large number of states, also in the MENA region, have made substantive reservations. Belgium regrets the existence of such reservations and encourages the States parties concerned to review and withdraw them.

I would like to **conclude** by reaffirming Belgium's strong commitment towards the implementation of UN resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions. We continue to implement our third National Action Plan. As a non-permanent member of this Council, we will actively support the Women, Peace and Security agenda throughout the next two years.