

## JOINT STATEMENT BENELUX

UNSC open debate on Protecting Participation: Addressing Violence Targeting Women in Peace and Security Processes

New York, 18/01/2022

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Madam President,  
High Commissioner,  
Excellencies

I deliver this statement on behalf of the Benelux countries, Belgium, the Kingdom of Netherlands and Luxembourg and would like to align with the statements of the European Union and the Group of Friends.

We thank the briefers for their testimonies today. It is alarming to see the unprecedented and appalling levels of violence, harassment, and reprisals against women human rights defenders, [most often perpetrated by those that prey on conflict-torn societies for their own gain]. The Security Council has a responsibility to ensure a safe and secure environment for civil society actors, journalists, and trade union members to carry out their essential peacebuilding efforts. However, at present, the burden is placed almost entirely on the individuals themselves.

According to the NGO working group on Women, Peace and Security, the Security Council has “failed to address the root causes of this issue or mount an effective response when attacks against civil society occur”, and the protection of women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders remains one of the starkest gaps in the Security Council’s implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We are grateful to Norway for the opportunity to deepen the reflections on measures the Security Council can take, building on the discussions that we started during the Arria-formula meeting on this topic in February 2020 during the Belgian presidency of the UNSC, where Benelux countries equally voiced their concerns.

Madam President,

Our countries actively support the work of OHCHR, UN Women and the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund in preventing and addressing reprisals, and we call on all Member States to do the same. Civil society has also issued recommendations to Member States and the diplomatic community to lower risks, such as the guidelines on the protection of women human rights defenders developed by PBI and Cordaid and the Dutch Gender Platform WO=MEN or by the International Service for Human Rights.

We see six key recommendations for Member States going forward:

1. At the international level: continue to advocate for a more enabling environment for civil society to do their work, free from fear, threats, harassment, violence, or reprisals of any kind.
2. Apply a gender perspective in peace and security processes, consider the specific risks faced by different groups of women human rights defenders, and integrate appropriate risk mitigation where possible.
3. Be mindful that merely receiving diplomatic support or being in contact with diplomats can put women human rights defenders at risk. Any action taken to protect or empower women human rights defenders must be at the expressed wish and in close consultation with the person concerned to minimize the possibility of reprisals.
4. Increase visibility for the work of specific civil society members with their consent, through media or by bringing up individual cases directly with the respective authorities.
5. Open avenues for reporting of individual cases, collecting data and strengthening monitoring mechanisms, both at the national and international level.
6. Support national authorities through capacity building to recognize and address threats to civil society and ensure accountability.

Finally, the past years we have unfortunately seen several cases of reprisals against briefers that have addressed this Council. Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Luxembourg express our strong commitment to zero tolerance for such acts of violence. Women human rights defenders' engagement with the Security Council's work is crucial to deepen our understanding of local dynamics that can make or break peace and post-conflict reconstruction processes. We have a collective responsibility to protect the people who have the courage to come to this room and share their stories with the world, to end situations of injustice. This includes taking precautions to mitigate physical and digital security risks, among others by identifying safe communication systems to contact the briever. In case of reprisals, there is a need for accountability and protection. Member states should collectively stand ready to raise situations with the respective country and provide emergency assistance to the briever.

Madam President, our countries stand ready to continue our engagement on this critical issue. I thank you.