



***Remarks of United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the Side Event on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Advancing Women's Leadership and Participation - 12 March 2018***

*As delivered*

Thank you very much, Ambassador, for setting the scene and giving us the lay of the land. I also want to welcome the many colleagues who are here from different parts of the world, and thank you so much for the work that you do. Many of you partner with us in the field.

It is significant that we are now in a phase where consultation with women and their participation in influencing the strategies and policies dealing with counterterrorism have finally become a way of life and integrated.

It is also important that we continue, as different actors working with women, to enrich the discussion. We will certainly be working very hard to ensure that we do so when the consultation happens in June.

The connection between gender inequality and terrorism has become undeniable.

Terrorists and violent extremists have increasingly targeted women and women's rights as a tactic of terrorism. We also know at the same time how violence against women, and rape in particular as a weapon of war, are very much associated with terrorism.

Killing innocent civilians has not been enough for them, terrorists have also targeted women specifically to victimize them. They have robbed women and girls of family members, development and educational opportunities, and in fact, they have questioned the need and the right of women to education, making it very difficult for women to enjoy the quality of life that their male counterparts would enjoy.

They have destroyed the social fabric of communities by kidnapping and attacking women and girls.

At the same time, we have also seen girls and women voluntarily choosing to support or join these groups, and themselves becoming therefore simultaneously victimized and dangerous to society.

And because we know how dehumanized women are when they join these groups the constant question to ourselves has been: how and why would women voluntarily become part of this? And this is where we as a society have to reflect about the conditions we have created that make it easy for women to choose that path, as opposed to women being part of mainstream society.

Understanding these issues is critical to deepening our understanding of the dynamics of women's radicalization and ensuring that our prevention and response reflect these dynamics and understanding.

In my own interaction with women whose children have been radicalized, one thing that has come through very strongly is poverty. One mother said to me, 'we used to be so hungry and I could see my children's hunger in their faces, and when one of our boys began to bring food to us, I knew that it was not coming from a good place, but I took it nevertheless. And over time I got to know the horrible things that he was involved in, and I still did not do anything. Do you understand the guilt that I feel?' And she said to me, 'Executive Director, I ask you, no women must be put in this situation and this condition that I am in today.'

And as I speak now I don't even know what has happened to her.

This is just one testimony of a mother in DRC; there are many others who are in the same situation.

I have also heard from women from Syria, who have lost loved ones, whose anger is all-consuming. Their desperation and helplessness, and the lack of resources for them to get on with their lives led one woman to say to me, 'Even though I am so angry, and I am fighting against terrorism like all of you, yet I do not know if I would turn down help from a terrorist.'

So, it is really a complex field that we are dealing with. It is very much integrated with issues of poverty, lack of participation, and non-inclusive economies and contexts.

UN Women has begun this work in many countries in the last few years. Some of the fastest growing areas of our work are on humanitarian issues and counterterrorism. That is a significant wake up call.

We are working in a variety of countries, having started in the Middle East particularly, and now working from Indonesia to Mali. In all of these countries, the involvement of women as leaders is critical, especially at local government level, and participating in different ways in shaping policies and decision-making.

And I hope that Member States understand that when we are pushing for participation of women, there is a benefit also for them in countering terrorism, when women are represented in high numbers and at appropriate levels.

We have also been in discussion with countries that have fighters returning. This includes families who have someone who was radicalized and involved in fighting; or families who have to deal with a girl or woman who has disappeared, and don't know how to trace her; or families who feel that as the returned come back from fighting they just do not know what the rights of these people are, and at the same time they are afraid because they do not know what state of mind the returned are in.

These are some of the new unknowns for all of us. But women are in the midst in of all of this, with those who are fighting for a solution. They are also amongst those who can bring danger. We are unfortunately not in a position to claim that women are always the innocent parties.

We hope that during today's discussion we will be able to share some of our best practices and experiences, so that we can begin to develop together some of the social networks that can prevent and counter terrorism. In addition, the bigger challenge of jurisprudence that deals with these issues is a big responsibility that has to have a gendered response. Whatever we do, we have to have a gender-sensitive response, because women are a key component of the responses that we seek.

Thank you very much.