

United Nations Workshop on Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Role of Parliament

**Keynote Address by the Rt. Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu
Speaker of the Parliament of Sierra Leone
Committee Room 1, Parliament Building, Tower Hill, Freetown
12th July 2018**

Country Director, UNDP,
Members of the High Table,
Hon. Members of Parliament,
All other Protocols Observed:

It is a great honour for me to be invited here today to deliver this Keynote Address on the United Nations Agenda on Women, Peace and Security and the Role of the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

This is the first major workshop in Parliament since my election as Speaker of this Honourable House and it is personally gratifying that it is on a gender issue and more particularly on the Women Peace and Security Agenda. Gratifying because I have always considered myself a champion of gender issues and nothing is more rewarding than being called upon to participate as the Speaker of our Parliament that has been selected as one of only four Parliaments across the globe for this pilot exercise and the only one in Africa.

For this our thanks go to the UNDP, our long standing partner, for working closely with us and for supporting our Parliament in strengthening efforts, particularly in setting up our Parliamentary Service. Our thanks also go to the Government of Norway for their invaluable support to the UNDP to undertake this exercise.

As you all may be aware, the Women Peace and Security Agenda was formally adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 31 October 2000 by way of its famous Resolution 1325. That Resolution has since

received further reaffirmation in a plethora of Security Council Resolutions like Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242, to name just a few. All of these Resolutions call attention to the unique needs of women in conflict-affected areas. They also call for a variety of interventions at national level to protect women and girls affected by conflict and to ensure their inclusion in the peace building processes that so vitally affect their lives.

These resolutions further call attention to the promotion of women's participation in decision-making, peace processes, political, judicial and electoral systems, post-conflict peace building and other efforts aimed at preventing violent extremism.

It is especially significant here to recall that by Resolution 1325 the United Nations Security Council recognized for the very first time ever that men and women experience conflicts differently, and that women do play an integral role in conflict prevention, resolution and recovery. It therefore urged all member states of the United Nations to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. The Council also urged member states to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes including, inter alia, the United Nations Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This seminal Security Council resolution signified an historic shift in policy orientation thus heralding what is today known as the Women Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda.

Equally importantly, Resolution 1325 emphasizes certain responsibilities for the member states of the United Nations. First, they are required to put an end to impunity and to prosecute any persons who are responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard member states of the United Nations are obliged to ensure that these crimes are excluded from any amnesty provisions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the central focus of Resolution 1325 is on global commitments, it also makes it abundantly clear that action has to be taken at the national level if the terms of the Resolution are to be given full effect.

For us in Sierra Leone, in the aftermath of our horrible internecine conflict, all these interventions were particularly relevant. It is to our credit as a nation that after the signing of the Lome Peace Accord, we managed our affairs creditably, supported local women's peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes and supported initiatives to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence. Gender activists were and have been in the forefront in highlighting these issues and pushing for legal reform.

And over the years since the country has moved on.

Now, at the start of this 5th Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, we need to take a fresh look on gender. We should apply new gender lenses while looking at legislation and acknowledging more than ever before the basic principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. We also need to take a quantum leap to shift to long term strategies to promote, strengthen, consolidate and ensure that it will endure. We also need to think more in development terms and strive to align our vision and perspectives with that of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

In a particular sense we need to also think out of the box; to think around ways and means to promote women's participation at all levels of decision-making, strengthen the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, as well as women's rights under our national laws. This would require this Parliament and Honourable Members to learn the skill of engendering the law-making process to bring us finally to that destination.

Under Resolution 1325, countries are encouraged to adopt National Action Plans (NAP) in order to ensure locally appropriate responses. Sierra Leone in 2010 became the 3rd country in West Africa to domesticate Resolution 1325 by developing a National Action Plan. This was the SILNAP or the Sierra Leone National Action Plan for the Full Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1820. This Plan covered

the period of 5 years from 2010 to 2015. It was subsequently evaluated and key challenges were highlighted in terms of funding and meaningful localization and institutionalization of the WPS Agenda. Thus a lot remains to be done.

I understand that consistent funding has been a challenge across Africa for the WPS Agenda even though modest progress has been made. In Sierra Leone, in 2018, with a New Direction Government in place, there is now a great opportunity and renewed enthusiasm. I understand that there are ongoing efforts to move forward with a new National Gender Strategy and a WPS National Action Plan.

It is here that this new Parliament with a newly constituted Women Caucus and Executive can and will surely play its mandated role in pushing the WPS Agenda. I am convinced that this Parliament will be more than happy to be engaged in this process of designing the new National Action Plan on the WPS.

Furthermore, in order to ensure Parliamentary ownership of the WPS Agenda, I am willing, as the Speaker of this Parliament and Chairman of the Parliamentary Service Commission, to take on board recommendations emerging from this Workshop which I understand will take stock of the national WPS framework and identify the way forward.

The Women Members of our Parliament, I am sure, will be participating in this process and may have suggestions which they would like to put forward during this current Session of Parliament. In consonance with the New Direction, I am sure this Parliament is committed to be more efficient, effective and accountable in this regard.

We intend to improve upon our Parliamentary oversight work, budgetary analyses and law making processes. We are ready and willing to be more open-minded and to provide the necessary space to accommodate and promote gender issues.

For a start I am assured that the new Women Caucus in this Parliament was set up in record time and in a smooth and swift manner. It is mostly to

their credit that they have been successful in setting up this cross-party Caucus in this very short space of time. It shows their commitment and determination to promote the WPS agenda which is going to be your specific area of focus in your deliberations today and tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish you all a sound and fruitful outcome from your deliberations and I thank you all for your kind attention.