United Nations 2020: Enhancing peace, disarmament & the role of women
A global webinar commemorating the 75th anniversary of the UN Charter

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Distinguished Fellow Speakers,
Ms. Basu,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND), the World Future Council and Women Legislators’ Lobby for organizing this important event. The role of women for disarmament and peace is a topic close to my heart.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added a layer of uncertainty to an already unpredictable global environment. Relationships between the great powers is increasingly tense; resources for militaries are continuing to grow; and new weapon technologies are developing with unpredictable implications.

In the Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament *Securing our Common Future*, launched two years ago, the Secretary-General lays out four key pillars to achieve peace and security through disarmament that are as relevant now as ever. These include disarmament to save humanity related to weapons of mass destruction; disarmament that saves lives through stronger restrictions over conventional weapons; disarmament for future generations by making sure rapidly developing technologies are not misused, and strengthening partnerships for disarmament. The Agenda covers 40 practical actions that UN entities can undertake in support of Member States. It also includes a set of actions tied to the Sustainable Development Goals because progress in one agenda item advances the other.

In this time, we must accelerate progress on existing instruments while also finding new and creative ways to ensure sustainable peace for all. That is why we need more than ever to listen to a diverse range of perspectives and to leave no one behind, and that is why the agenda’s focus on partnerships is so important. The field of disarmament requires that we walk the extra mile to include the voices that are not commonly heard in the discourse and that we actively value people’s different experiences and backgrounds.

Gender equality, therefore, is not only a moral imperative and fundamental human right, but also a powerful tool for progress in peace and disarmament. Recognizing this, the Secretary-
General’s Agenda includes distinct actions on ensuring the full and equal participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament and international security.

We have, too, global commitments that recognize the need for women’s equal participation for the international peace and security. The 75th anniversary of the United Nations is also an important year in this regard, as 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the 10th anniversary of the General Assembly resolution on Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control.

In disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, women’s vital contribution is increasingly acknowledged and highlighted. Yet, women remain chronically underrepresented, not least in decision-making and leadership. In United Nations disarmament meetings, only about one third of delegates are women and many delegations include no women at all.

To put these commitments into practice, we all must play a role in ensuring diverse representation and gender parity. As High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and an International Gender Champion, I have made it my mission to promote the full and equal participation of women in all of my Office’s activities and in multilateral disarmament mechanisms. I do not want to hear that there aren’t enough qualified women – because there are, and I am happy that the two disarmament Groups of Governmental Experts established in 2019, based on nominations received from Member States, have attained gender parity and, consistently in the last few years we have also attained parity in our annual Disarmament Fellowship programme.

We also need to foster an inclusive culture that allows for underrepresented groups to take their rightful place at the table. Diversity and equal representation of women will mean little unless there is an enabling environment where all voices are heard and participation is truly meaningful. The UN Secretary-General recently made clear that gender inequality is a question of power and that it is time to stop trying to change women and start changing the systems that prevent them from achieving their potential.
When I speak about including more voices, I speak too of youth. As part of the largest generation in history, today’s young people hold great responsibility and potential to accelerate progress in disarmament. The Disarmament Agenda also recognizes that young people are “the ultimate force for change”. You may recall that young campaigners, many of whom were women, worked at the forefront of successful international campaigns to ban landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear weapons. The important and positive contributions that young people can make in sustaining peace was reaffirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019 by adopting its resolution on “Youth, Disarmament and Non-proliferation”

I believe that the continued relevance of multilateralism depends on how we also create space for young people to fully participate. This is crucial for developing new strategies to reduce threats and proliferation from weapons and arms. My office is engaging, educating and empowering young people through an outreach initiative, “#Youth4Disarmament” under which various resources, including e-newsletters, training programmes and a dedicated youth website are now made available.

Historically we know that all disarmament initiatives are most successful when they allow for effective partnerships between different stakeholders— the United Nations, governments, parliamentarians, women’s organizations, civil society, youth and the private sector. If there is one lesson to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that our future is best secured through global cooperation and multi-stakeholder action. My office stands ready to continue working together with all of you in a push for our joint goal of gender equality, peace and disarmament.

I thank you very much and I am looking forward to the discussion.