*ASEAN workshop on Enhancing the Roles of ASEAN Women in Sustainable Peace and Security*

Ha Noi, 24 November 2020

Åpningssesjon

Your Excellency, Deputy Minister Nguyen Quoc Dzung, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you this afternoon from Oslo. To take a close look at how we move forward towards sustainable and inclusive peace and security. And to further strengthen the cooperation between ASEAN and Norway. We are thankful to Vietnam for hosting the meeting.

ASEAN is showing remarkable commitment to the women, peace and security agenda. It was inspiring to see that discussions on this issue were convened at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in October and at the recent ASEAN Summit. We look to ASEAN for some of the most renowned women peacemakers and proponents of this agenda globally. We also work with a great number of talented, young women across the region that drive peace efforts in their communities and countries.

Vietnam and Norway share a commitment to a rules-based international order. We also share the belief that inclusion of women is essential for conflict prevention and peace building. Women represent 50 % of the population and often have better access and understanding of what happens in the communities and at the grassroots level. In times of a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, this is more important than ever.

Vietnam’s commitment to regional and international peace and security is strong, and clearly visible in your current membership of the UN Security Council and as chair of ASEAN 2020. Next year, Vietnam and Norway will serve on the Security Council together. I look forward to this cooperation.

Norway has committed to working for women’s rights and inclusion when we take our seat as elected member of the Security Council next year. We will draw from experiences from our engagement in peace and reconciliation efforts.

We will do our utmost to bring this agenda forward - as we work on mandates, resolutions and presidential statements. And as we contribute to reports and take part in field visits. Because mandates and resolutions have implications on the ground. We will pay close attention to recommendations from the informal expert group on women, peace and security. We will invite women peacebuilders to brief the Council. We will strive to ensure that they are safe before, during and after their contributions.

We will work closely with partners in our efforts. Women, peace and security is an area where we have seen cross-regional alliances work in practice. Regional actors, like ASEAN, the AU, SADC and IGAD have adopted the agenda as a priority. There are strong partnerships between civil society and Governments. Partnerships that we have seen from our experience are crucial for driving the agenda forward, for successful implementation.

The Women Mediators Networks are an asset in this regard. In 2015 we created the Nordic Women Mediators Network, and we have cooperation with the ASEAN Women Peace Registry. In South East Asia, a Southeast Asia Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators Network (SAWPNMN) is under development. This will complement and cooperate closely with the ASEAN Women Peace Registry.

These Networks provide a pool of highly qualified experts that can be appointed to peace processes. Diversity in backgrounds is an asset. The members build trust and capacity through exchanges with each other.

Many of you met at the General Assembly in New York last year, to launch the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks. We now have a web of global solidarity. This is a group that is simply too large and competent to be put on the sideline.

Let me pose a question for reflection in this seminar. It is 2020. It is the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325, the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. How can we leverage the anniversaries to make peace efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic more inclusive? How can we ensure that a “return to normalcy” does not mean a return to exclusion?

First of all, let us not be derailed by the COVID-19 situation. Certainly, the pandemic changes our ways of working. But it does not change the imperative of ensuring women’s inclusion in peace and security.

This new situation we find ourselves in has the potential to bolster women’s participation and rights. Or set us back.

A key challenge is the digital divide. There is less access in remote and conflict-ridden areas, and less access for women than for men. These facts have implications for inclusion.

Also, simultaneous interpretation proves hard to do in virtual meetings, de facto deciding who gets to speak and who understands the full meaning of the discussion. This impacts power relations.

If we are serious about inclusion, we must bridge the digital divide. Many peacebuilders are able to connect, however. We see many organisations connecting more regularly now, reaching some via teams or zoom, some via WhatsApp, Viber or phone. It is not perfect, but it works.

The format has changed, but negotiations still happen. Where there is trust and established relationships, work might move forward virtually, allowing more people to take part, and more frequently. Sometimes it is even more secure for those involved, as there is no need for visas or plane tickets. This opens up new spaces. There are advantages in this situation that we can capitalize on.

However, we also keep an eye on their safety, as we know that monitoring of the pandemic might be used to surveil peacebuilders and limit their work.

Flexibility is required in our partnerships. While this is always the case, the pandemic has made the need for flexibility more urgent. Therefore, we have an ongoing dialogue with our partners on how to adapt accordingly.

Norway has committed to focusing on inclusion in every phase of a peace process. It’s time to think innovatively about how to better connect formal processes with grassroots initiatives, and promote greater effectiveness and transparency. Although we know what to focus on, we have to adapt our approaches to a new situation. But inclusion has always required both creativity and solid commitment.

Thank you.