*HOW CAN CHALLENGES BE OVERCOME, AND WHAT ACTIONS ARE NEEDED?*

*Strengthen women’s* ***representation*** *and participation in peace processes and post-conflict peacebuilding*

First of all, let me thank Vietnam and the UN for convening this imortant conference. Thank you for inviting me to take part. It is such an honour to join these colleagues, many of whom I know and for whom I have great respect.

I will raise four points today, that we believe to be essential in order to move forward:

**First**: **We must do more to level the playing field from the start.**

We cannot bring anyone to a table that doesn’t exist, and discretion might inhibit us from discussing how we work with the parties.

But, even before conflict parties are brought to the negotiation table, we can and should engage the parties in conversations on the importance of inclusion; what it means, how it can be done and why it matters.

Also, we can and should reach out to women and civil society organisations - to find out what their needs and priorities are.

If the agenda has been set and the delegations decided before women are brought in, inclusion will be all the more difficult later.

Therefore, identifying key women actors at an early stage, and investing in them, is an investment in the future process too.

**Second: We must learn from other processes.**

We need to ask ourselves: How has inclusion been made possible in other processes? What made it difficult?

Inclusion mechanisms have evolved the past few years, many worth studying closely: the situation rooms in a range of African countries, the sub-committee on gender in the Colombia process, the Syrian Women’s Advisory Board and Civil Society Support Room, are just a few.

Inclusion mechanisms might certainly indicate that the main track – the main negotiation table - did not sufficiently succeed in including women and other key stakeholders. And, inclusion mechanisms should always complement and never replace efforts to ensure women’s participation in the main track.

Nevertheless, there might be important takeaways from these efforts – not least where the starting point is less than perfect – which it often is.

I would say, though, that a main challenge - and goal - with regard to consultations as well as inclusion mechanisms, is to ensure that there is uptake. That someone receives the input, messages and recommendations coming out of the consultations and deliberations. That the recommendations become the business of the conflict parties, that they need to deal with.

The Colombian sub-commission on gender is a good example in that regard, because its work was directly linked to the table. We need these links. And we need links between the different tracks. Track 1, 2 and 3 all have their merit, but we need to link them.

Another recurring matter is the legitimacy of the inclusion mechanism. We need to enable those that take part in this work to remain in steady contact with their constituencies

- so that they have the input and the backing they need,

- and so that the people they intend to speak for are able to feed in, understand and support the process.

We should learn from those involved in other processes too.

In September last year, the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediators Networks was launched. These women mediators are practitioners, with experience from a wide range of peace processes. We would benefit from engaging them in our peace and reconciliation work.

**Third:** **We need to retain the focus on women’s participation and rights after a peace accord has been signed.**

We often focus most of our attention on the negotiation phase, but we know from experience that the phase following the signing of the accord can be long and hard, and that backlashes may occur.

We must therefore support the parties’ and civil society’s efforts to promote women’s representation in constitutional committees and security sector reform, in transitional justice and peace monitoring missions, highlight the gender perspective in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts.

Ceasefire and peace agreements must not only be agreed, but also implemented in such a way, that they benefit both women and men, boys and girls.

**Fourth and finally: Women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are increasingly being harassed and threatened, violated and killed.** This is unacceptable, a huge human rights problem, and a huge problem for our peace and security work, that depend on their contributions.

It is our duty as member states – and the UN – to ensure an enabling and safe environment for women peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

Thank you