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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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United Nations Peace Operations: Women in Peacekeeping

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
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of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Gender parity in peace operations has vast potential to improve effectiveness, capability and credibility. We have made pledges to do better and set targets to go higher. But, in the field, the number of uniformed women remains extremely low and the rate of change has, speaking frankly, been glacial. This failing is undermining UN efforts to fulfil mandates and sustain peace.

Women make up half the world's population, suffer disproportionately and differently in conflict, and have in-depth knowledge of local context and community needs. Yet women only make up 4 per cent of military and 10 per cent of police personnel in UN peace operations. This is compromising our

engagement with local communities, limiting our situational awareness and inhibiting the protection reach of peacekeeping missions.

Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's firm commitment to gender equality, supported by the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy. We support the Elsie Initiative which aims to accelerate the pace of change and enhance the deployment of women as peacekeepers. The appointment of women into senior leadership positions is crucial, yet continues to face the greatest barriers. In January 2019, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus became the first ever peacekeeping mission to be led by a female SRSG, Force Commander and Senior Police Advisor. Australia was proud to be a part of this milestone, but to take 70 years to achieve this is far too long.

We must acknowledge that a major reason so few women are deployed to UN peace operations is because women are underrepresented in security forces across the world. Increasing the number of women relies on Member States putting initiatives in place to support the recruitment, retention, promotion and deployment of women within their security forces. This is not just about numbers, but also about cultural and organisational change. This includes removing gender restrictions on all occupations,

increasing flexible employment options and reducing gender stereotyping and sexual harassment.

Australia is committed to the full inclusion of women in our defence and police forces and to mainstreaming a gender perspective across operations. It is fundamental to strengthen our workforce capability and improve operational effectiveness. The same applies to UN peacekeeping missions. We have translated this commitment at the UN by achieving and exceeding the uniformed women targets. We have provided gender advisers to UN missions and stress the importance of adequately resourcing these positions in all missions. We also fund the participation of female peacekeepers at UN training courses to increase the numbers, qualifications and readiness of women for a peacekeeping deployment.

Evidence shows women and men serve better together. UN peace operations exist to support the most vulnerable people in the most difficult conditions. They require and deserve the most capable and effective missions we can provide. This can only be done if we draw on the full human resources at our disposal and implement a gender perspective in all operations. In this, the UN must lead by example.