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**Statement**

by

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Deputy Permanent Representative

**Arria Formula – Strengthening an Integrated Approach to Peace and  
Security in the Sahel through a Gender Lens: Launch of the Group of Friends  
of Women of the Sahel**

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Saint Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates Niger, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and the Permanent Representations of the African Union and the European Union, on the launch of the Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel.

We are pleased to join this group, not only because we believe deeply in Sahelian women's leadership, participation and contribution to durable peace, security and development, but also because of a shared ancestral lineage of Vincentian and Caribbean people with the people of the Sahel. Like other members of the GoF, we look forward to learning from and with Sahelian women, as experts on what is required for their own advancement. Madame Cissé, we endorse your call for the creation of a permanent discussion space between the Platform of the Women of the G5 Sahel Region and the GoF.

We cannot emphasise enough how the pandemic has sharpened existing cleavages in the region. Women and girls in the Sahel are confronting intersecting crises. Serious security, climate-related, social and economic challenges continue to undermine the lives and livelihoods of women and youth in the region. However, women civil society and community leaders have been tremendous in their prevention, response and peacebuilding efforts.

In this regard, we commend the UN/CSO partnership which sees the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, actively support 26 women-led and women's rights CSOs across Mali, specifically targeting displaced women and girls, as well as local women and women's association for enhanced participation in decision-making, economic empowerment, capacity building on conflict prevention, CRSV support and reintegration.

African women contributed significantly to the establishment of the WPS agenda some 21 years ago. In the two decades since, we have witnessed meaningful progress on the normative framework. The AU Gender Policy and the Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS are critical in this regard. We welcome the recent launch of the ECOWAS Commission Guidelines on WPS, which builds on its Gender Policy, and Gender and Elections Strategic Framework (2016). The 2020 joint launch of the "Programme to accelerate the implementation of the WPS agenda . . . in the Sahel region," with its aim to enhance partnerships with Governments, regional organisations and the UN, is yet another welcome step.

A key objective of the GoF is strengthening the integrated approach to peace and security in the Sahel through a gendered lens. This is critical to closing the gap between policies and implementation, and to unlocking a clear pathway for achieving the objectives established in the AU Strategy for the Sahel, the UN Integrated Strategy of the Sahel, Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

Excellencies,

Systemic and structural changes require local, national and regional ownership, and international support. This must be underpinned by shifts in ideologies, beliefs and practices to promote gender justice and equity. Indeed, it is hard work that requires political will, as well as adequate and consistent funding. It must be guided and led by Sahelian women in communities, in women's organisations, in governments and in the international community. Our role in the GoF is to take direction from women in the Sahel.

Thank you.