



Security Council Debate on ‘Women, Peace and Security’

Adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) [on women and peace and security], S/RES/1820 (2008)

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/485bbca72.html>

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On Thursday, 19 June, the Security Council (SC) unanimously adopted Resolution 1820 (2008) dealing with Women and Peace and Security. The Resolution stressed that widespread or systematic sexual violence constitutes a threat to international peace and security and demanded the complete cessation of all acts of sexual violence by all parties to armed conflicts. It also noted that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, crime against humanity, or constitutive act with respect to genocide.

The Resolution requested the UN Secretary-General (SG) to submit a report on implementation of the resolution that would include information on sexual violence in specific conflict situations, and proposals aimed at minimizing the susceptibility of women and girls to such violence. It also requested him to develop effective guidelines and strategies to enhance the ability of relevant UN peacekeeping operations to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence.

Most importantly to UNHCR, the resolution noted that women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group. Paragraph 10 of the Resolution request the SG and relevant UN agencies to “develop effective mechanisms for providing protection from violence, in particular sexual violence, to women and girls in and around UN managed refugee and internally displaced persons camps, as well as in all disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes.”

Introductory Remarks:

Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State: Chairing the debate in the SC, Dr. Rice noted that there has been an ongoing debate about whether sexual violence is a security issue. By passing Resolution 1820 the SC would respond with a “resounding yes,” as the Resolution affirms that sexual violence against women not only affects the safety of women, but also the economic situation and security of all nations.

Dr. Rice took a moment to specifically mention the DRC, Sudan, and Burma. In regards to Burma she expressed her discontent that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was still placed under house arrest, rather than being allowed to take office as President of the country.

According to Dr. Rice, the international community had a special responsibility to expose perpetrators of sexual violence, including those who were representatives of international organizations. Furthermore, Member States had a responsibility to prosecute those responsible for such heinous acts.

Dr. Rice concluded that the way to measure the value of the international community is how effective it is at providing protection for the most vulnerable groups, especially women and children. Accordingly, it is the international community's job to be their advocates and defendants.

SG Ban Ki-Moon: The SG stated that in March he launched a global campaign to end violence against women, and soon, he would appoint a Messenger of Peace tasked entirely with advocacy for ending violence against women.

He said he was eager to deploy more women worldwide, as police, military and civilian personnel, as well as at the highest levels of mission leadership. Accordingly, if Member States came forward with more women candidates, he ensured that they would all be considered.

The SG urged Member States to do more to provide pre-deployment training for preventing and responding to sexual violence, and he announced that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was revising its standardized materials on that subject. He also emphasized that the United Nations has a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation or abuse by its own personnel.

He also stated that a dozen UN entities were working together in a concerted effort called UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, which brought together experts on issues like peacekeeping, development, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, human rights, humanitarian relief and gender concerns to help stop rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-torn countries.

The strategy for success according to the SG takes awareness-raising, effective security measures (including training for national military and police forces), close monitoring of human rights, prosecuting all perpetrators to the full extent of the law, and involving women in conflict prevention and peace negotiations. He also said that the problem must be viewed in the broader context of women's empowerment, which meant revising not only laws dealing with violence, but also those that affected women's rights with respect to other issues, like property, inheritance and divorce.

Srgjan Kerim, *President of the General Assembly* and Asha-Rose Migiro, *UN Deputy SG* reiterated the SG's remarks. They emphasized the role of the SC as well as the need for cooperation between all UN entities in order to end the use of sexual violence in conflict and post conflict areas.

Major General Patrick Cammart, Former Division Commander of MONUC: Due to the fact that sexual violence has now become a weapon of war, amongst a culture of impunity, Major General Cammart stated that it has now probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict.

As Peacekeepers could play an important role in preventing such violence in conflict zones, he stressed that it was crucial for the SC to continue providing peacekeeping operations with mandates to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. He further argued that United Nations peacekeeping forces must have clear mandates, sufficient armament, and well-trained and equipped troops, with the Commanders of such troops willing to take swift decisions when the presence of armed groups was reported.

Finally, Major General Cammart emphasized that local women who live in fear of men due to repeated sexual violence, often perpetrated by men in uniform, feel more confident talking to other women. Therefore he called for the participation of more women in peacekeeping missions as it could enhance confidence-building in the host community by presenting an organization that looked like a civilian society, rather than a military occupation force.

Statements by Permanent Members of the SC:

United Kingdom: The UK expressed great concern that sexual violence was now being used as a tool of warfare, rather than just a by-product of conflict, and as a result, was taking place on a much larger scale than in the past. For evidence of this, the UK stated that one need only to look at the burnt out communities of those who have fled for their safety.

The UK stated that the SC should show leadership on this issue and (1) recognize that widespread and systematic sexual violence can pose a threat to international peace and security, (2) ensure women's participation in all aspects of peacekeeping, (3) propose practice measures that parties to armed conflicts can take to prevent sexual violence and ensure those who do commit the crime are brought to justice, and (4) require regular updates on sexual violence in particular armed conflicts.

France: France stressed that peace could not be re-established while remaining silent about the violence done to women. The Secretary of State expressed specific concerns with the DRC where nearly 30,000 women had been raped in the Kivus during 2007. She noted that many of these women were afraid to return home out of fear that the army would capture them again, and they would once again be raped.

France stated that the UN must act to disarm the armed groups, put an end to trafficking of weapons, make sure victims are kept apart from their original capturers, make sure that the perpetrators are held responsible, and work together with local communities to avoid the stigmatization of victims.

Finally, France announced that the EU would make the issue of sexual violence a priority on both political and financial levels, and under France's presidency, beginning 1 July, guidelines would be developed and, hopefully, adopted.

China: China urged troop-contributing countries to step up training and monitoring of their peacekeepers to ensure compliance with norms of conduct. He also emphasized that, while the Council had a unique role to play in addressing violence against women, organs and agencies of the United Nations should strengthen their coordination and cooperation. The Security-Council should focus on prevention of conflicts, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. China also stressed that non-governmental organizations increase their communication with United Nations agencies.

Russia: The Russian Federation stated that the international community must address the issue of women, peace and security broadly, and not just as a matter of sexual violence. Russia also cautioned duplication of efforts in the field. Russia felt that the Resolution's request that the Secretary-General prepare a report on women in conflict situations appeared to be a repetition of efforts taking place outside the Council, including in the General Assembly, where a resolution had been adopted during the current session requiring the Secretary-General to prepare a similar report on sexual violence.

General Themes among the Speakers:

All States agreed that widespread and systematic sexual violence is a threat to international peace and security, and a barrier in the peacebuilding process. Furthermore, most states also expressed great concern about the fact that sexual violence was now used as a weapon of war and a tool to achieve political and military gains. A large majority of the states also referred to SC Resolution

1325, referring to it as a breakthrough, but expressing dissatisfaction that eight years later, it has yet to be fully implemented.

Another common talking point was the need to bring the culture of impunity around sexual violence to an end, as well as the need to shift the balance of victims living in shame to the perpetrators doing so. Many states congratulated the work of the ICC and the other international tribunals for recognizing that sexual violence was a crime within their jurisdiction. Furthermore, a majority of states supported a zero tolerance policy toward sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel.

There was also a great call for SC mandates for UN peacekeeping missions to be clear and strong, with specific provisions to deal with SGBV. Many states also urged that more women are deployed to missions and appointed to high level positions in both the political and social sphere.

Finally, many states stressed the need for credible and reliable information, and urged further cooperation with Non-governmental organizations and the media.

Other countries of interest:

Croatia noted that a large part of the refugees from the war in the early 90s were women, who required food, shelter, and medical supplies. Croatia further stated that the UNHCR's help was invaluable in protecting these women.

South Africa noted that the deployment of women personnel to refugee camps was helping more victims to gain the courage to talk about their experience.

Libya suggested that religion should be utilized as all religions had norms on relations between soldiers and non-combatants, and the treatment of civilians. As foot soldiers are generally not aware of international humanitarian law, which is taught primarily to generals, Libya suggested that booklets could be prepared on the religious norms and distributed to soldiers in peace operations.

Vietnam suggested that UN Action should serve as a tool to enhance coordination between the SC and other UN agencies.

Costa Rica announced that two weeks ago several ambassadors visited refugee camps in Darfur, Chad, and the DRC, and listened to the women and their experiences. Costa Rica urged that the UN respect the wishes of these women, which were to return home in a safe and secure environment, not revenge.

DRC stated that sexual violence leads to the feminization of poverty and food insecurity as victims generally are no longer able to work.

Nigeria stated that the UN must strengthen reporting and monitoring mechanisms in conflict zones and in camps where women are known to be especially valuable.

Tonga (on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing State) stated that climate change could lead to "resource wars" over oil, water and arable land, and it was very likely that women would be exposed to gender-based violence in such conflicts, especially as gender differences were made more prominent in the process of adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change. Tonga, therefore stated that the Security-Council should consider climate change as a threat to women's security, as well as to international security and peace.

Mauritania stated that the language requirements for assignment to UNAMID was overly stringent. Accordingly, the requirement should be re-examined, so that sufficiently qualified women who wished to serve there could apply for posts.

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