

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
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Statement by Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations

I too thank the Council presidency for having taken the initiative to organize this important debate. This is an opportunity for us to review the efforts of peacekeeping missions against sexual violence in times of conflict. This question remains one of the major challenges confronting us. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS) are deeply concerned by ongoing sexual violence against civilians, in particular women and children, in conflict zones in spite of repeated condemnations by the international community.

In 2010, DPKO and DFS launched various targeted initiatives to improve the implementation of our protection mandates. We have concentrated our efforts on the prevention of protection incidents by missions and on strengthening their capacities to support national authorities in the implementation of their responsibilities to protect civilians in their territories.

It is vital to recognize that peacekeeping missions are but one protection actor among others, beginning, of course, with the Government of the host country, and that they cannot guarantee absolute protection. We have always said that we expect each mission component to do its utmost to prevent any occurrence of sexual violence.

After developing the operational concepts earlier this year, we centred our actions around five key pillars in order to improve the planning and implementation of our protection mandates. These are: first, the development of a strategic reference framework to guide the development of missions' protection strategies; second, training modules on the protection of civilians for pre- and post-deployment courses, which include practical exercises and address all components of peacekeeping missions; third, an assessment of resources and capacities necessary for the implementation of our civilian protection mandates; fourth, an in-depth study of planning processes for the protection of civilians pre- and postdeployment; and finally, capacity-building initiatives. We are working on a definition of standard capacities for our military personnel in order to better define our expectations for performance in civilian protection, and for our other mandated duties.

We have also undertaken specific initiatives to combat sexual violence, which are clearly at the centre of our efforts to protect civilians.

Addressing impunity, for example through the establishment of the rule of law and accountability, is another key plank of our ongoing efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence. DPKO, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme, developed the conceptual framework for a rapidly deployable team of experts on sexual violence in armed conflict, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1888 (2009). Members of the team, including a DPKO judicial officer, are currently in the process of being recruited, as just mentioned by Ms. Wallström.

A number of illustrative examples from the field include the case of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), where the military legal adviser in Goma is currently providing technical support to Congolese military justice authorities in the conduct of the Walikale investigation. MONUSCO is carrying out an ongoing procedural efficiency and fairness project, which provides training to military and civilian judges and prosecutors, with a particular focus on conflict-related sexual violence. The Mission is also in the process of establishing prosecution support cells to assist the military justice authorities of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in prosecuting persons arrested by the FARDC.

The United Nations Mission in the Sudan provides technical support to the Government of Southern Sudan to review, amend and enact legislation that ensures protection from sexual and gender-based violence. In the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), there is a project currently under way to train prosecution and investigation teams specifically on sexual and gender-based violence issues. In 2009, the Liberian judiciary launched, with the support of UNMIL, a dedicated court for sexual and gender-based violence cases that pays special attention to victim and witness protection.

We are addressing the question of the training of DPKO personnel to address conflict-related sexual violence in a comprehensive manner. I would like to highlight that DPKO and DFS are building the capacity of United Nations police officers to protect women and children from sexual violence through the development of a standardized training curriculum for United Nations police on investigating and preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

Capacity-building continues on the ground through the establishment of specialized police units and training curricula for investigators. These have proven effective in several peacekeeping missions. The United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, for example, has conducted training for the Timor-Leste national police on gender-based violence investigations. It has also produced a manual on the topic for community police and elements of the Vulnerable Persons Units.

DPKO and DFS are also planning to launch a United Nations police standardized best practices toolkit on gender and policing in peacekeeping operations in 2011, the aim of which is to ensure that such practices are shared among peacekeeping missions and implemented.

On the question of preparing peacekeeping personnel to implement their mandate to protect and to respond to conflict-related sexual violence, we are developing a training curriculum on gender mainstreaming for military components, based on the DPKO/DFS gender guidelines for United Nations military in peacekeeping operations, which will help military components to mainstream gender and protection from conflict-related sexual violence at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. General Gaye is in charge of that.

In addition, in partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and UN Women, scenariobased training materials developed on the basis of Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: An Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice are also under development for military components. The DPKO/DFS operational guidance to assist civilian, military and police components of peacekeeping missions to implement resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009) is in its final stages and will support the overall implementation of those resolutions in peacekeeping missions.

Also in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, we have taken steps to act on the request by this Council to appoint women's protection advisers in peacekeeping missions. We are currently undertaking consultations with our missions concerning the role and the responsibilities of women's protection advisers. Our preliminary discussions thus far indicate that the recruitment of advisers will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, owing to the differing architecture and challenges of each peacekeeping operation. We are striving to ensure that the way forward supports an integrated response that reinforces existing capacities on the ground, thus avoiding fragmentation and duplication of responsibilities.

As the Council is well aware, there remain a number of systemic challenges that prevent us from providing effective protection from conflict-related sexual violence. The insufficient number of female uniformed personnel is one of those challenges. In the absence of sufficient female personnel, the missions are often unable to effectively reach out to those we are mandated to protect, the majority of whom are women and children.

In spite of these constraints, our missions are endeavouring to do their best with the limited capacities they possess. For example, we have seen that the recruitment of national community liaison assistants has provided the necessary link between troops and local communities in the Kivus and is contributing towards enhanced protection of the civilian population. It is critical that this important outreach capacity be supported by a sufficient number of female Community liaison assistants, who will be able to communicate effectively with the women in the local communities we endeavour to protect. It should be noted, however, that there are sometimes cultural constraints involved with the use of female assistants.

On a more systemic level, the results of the Police Division's global effort have allowed us to increase the proportion of female police officers in our missions from 7.8 per cent to nearly 10 per cent now in one year. It is of note, for example, that women account for 24 per cent of the police personnel in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

In closing, I would like to stress that the economic, social and political empowerment of women within societies affected by armed conflict is fundamental to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence. Women must participate in reforming and building the institutions that will provide for their protection and indeed, for the protection of all civilians.