

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
16th-17th December 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Susan Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations

My thanks to the Secretary-General, Special Representative Wallstrom, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy, and Lieutenant-General Gaye for their very powerful and insightful briefings.

I also want to thank my colleagues in the Council for their very strong statements of support for this resolution we just adopted, 1960, as well as for the broad goals of fighting sexual violence and rape of women around the world.

We are gathered because we all agree on the importance of addressing an issue that cries out for the world's conscience—and that is sexual violence in conflict. We agree that the challenge is urgent and immense. The human cost is all too real. Armed conflicts continue to have a devastating impact, particularly on women and girls. Rape, sexual assault, and gender-based violence are all too often used deliberately and cynically as a weapon of war. And the fight to end sexual violence has yet to be universally recognized as central to securing international peace and security.

Some still think that sexual violence is somehow a natural accompaniment of conflict. It is not. As the Secretary-General's report notes, "The myth that rape is an inevitable byproduct of war is persistent and dangerously self-fulfilling." I hope that this session, in some small way, will help put an end to that myth—and channel our shared commitment to confront and combat sexual violence and take concrete actions that improve the fate of women and girls.

The United States commends the United Nations, especially UN Action, for its leadership in finding effective ways to address this problem. We have been encouraged by the UN's response and follow-up to the appalling August attacks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, including the additional steps it's taken to build mission-wide strategies to better protect civilians. The UN has increased random patrols, recruited more female peacekeepers, and improved communications. It's also employing scenario-based training for peacekeepers to help combat sexual violence. But obviously, more must still be done. We hope the UN will continue to identify women's protection advisers and put them in more peacekeeping operations and complete a gaps analysis of UN protection strategies.

In her brief tenure so far, Special Representative Wallstrom has brought leadership, passion and clarity to efforts to end impunity for the heinous crimes of sexual violence in conflict zones. She's playing a vital role in the UN's efforts to support the Democratic Republic of Congo government's response to the horrifying mass rapes in Walikale, which has included the arrests of one of the perpetrators. The United States fully supports Special Representative Wallstrom and her work, and we encourage our fellow member states to consider additional voluntary contributions to support her mandate. We particularly hope that the team of experts will become a valuable tool in helping member states develop appropriate judicial responses to sexual violence in conflict.

Data collection is also vital for non-humanitarian activities to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The resolution we adopted today will improve the collection and analysis of information required to better understand the patterns of sexual violence in armed conflict. Of course, better information by itself will not halt sexual violence. But it will inform our decisions as a Council and as member states and bring us one step closer to our ultimate goal.

We must also shine the international spotlight on the perpetrators and use this mechanism to inform targeted actions by this Council and by member states. With improved information, the UN will be able to assist states to respond more robustly to these crimes. As in the DRC after the Walikale rapes, we expect our actions will spur commanding officers to turn those who commit sexual violence over to the authorities to be brought to justice.

Finally, we cannot separate the challenge of sexual violence from the broader security issues facing this Council.

Resolution 1960 and its predecessors and our follow-up actions must send a clear message: we do not just condemn sexual violence and rape as weapons of war, but we are taking concrete steps to end it. We are working to make clear that rape and sexual violence are unacceptable and that perpetrators will face consequences.

Our shared responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security includes a profound responsibility to safeguard the lives and the security of women and girls, who make up at least half of humanity.

Thank you.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council and I give the floor to the Representative of Armenia.