

Briefing on Women, Peace and Security: Conflict-related sexual violence

Statement delivered by Ambassador Jim McLay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, 15 April 2015

Madam Secretary.

The Secretary-General's report paints a grim picture.

Civil conflict, the collapse of state authority, unprecedented numbers of displaced people, and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war have all exposed more women and girls to the risk of sexual violence than at any time in living memory.

There are many ways to approach this issue; but, today, I'm going to focus on the practical steps that might translate our collective commitments – the words of this Council around this table and the words of many others – that might translate those collective commitments into action, and which can result in safer environments for women and girls everywhere.

UN peace-keeping has a crucial role to play in meeting those commitments; particularly where the capacity of national authorities has been significantly degraded as is sadly the case in so many of the situations we must review.

That role can range from active enforcement, to providing support or capacity-building for national partners – all of them, wherever they are pitched, practical steps.

Madam President.

New Zealand has witnessed the impact that the United Nations can have on a post-conflict setting.

Timor-Leste, the Government sought the assistance of the UN Mission for developing community-based policing strategies to tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Initial support, through UNMIT, translated and transitioned into longer-term bilateral policing programmes and community policing and gender protection principles were integrated into Timor Leste's national legislation and into the country's policing doctrine doctrine and training.

All of which demonstrated the progress that can be made when strong, focused and determined national leadership receives targeted support from this Council and from the United Nations.

So, we commend DPKO and others for developing guidance and training on preventing and responding to sexual violence. Because it's important that our peace-keepers have access to that sort of guidance.

Madam President.

In many conflict situations, barriers to women's participation in decision-making are exacerbated, often excluding women from conflict resolution and peace-building; thus undermining the effectiveness and the sustainability of peace initiatives.

We therefore echo the Secretary General's call that sexual violence considerations be integrated into UN approaches in conflict and post-conflict settings, including protection of civilians and conflict resolution strategies – practical steps again, Madam President.

We also urge particular attention to combating sexual violence against displaced persons. And we have more of them these days than at any time since the Second World War.

In our region, Pacific Island Forum Leaders have recognised sexual violence, and violence against women, as the one of the most significant human security issues that face their communities.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, representing 21 member states, aims to develop practical, ethical policing standards in its member countries, including a Women's Advisory Network to support professional development and leadership of Pacific policewomen.

Preventing and combatting sexual violence is ultimately a national responsibility and that responsibility is assumed on behalf of organisations such as the Pacific Islands' chiefs of police.

Madam President.

The framework of Resolution 1325 provides useful mechanisms for supporting national and local solutions, including the development of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security.

New Zealand is currently finalising its own National Action Plan, which is under public consultation at this time.

That plan sets out a range of initiatives tailored to our specific needs and circumstances, including tackling domestic violence, ever a problem in all societies.

The Plan also focuses on increasing the number of military and policewomen available for senior deployment in peace-keeping operations.

Madam President.

Each of these, I've outlined is just one small step, but every single, small step can make a difference.

And, collectively, all of those differences will be important, because it's only if we take such steps that we can make progress against sexual violence.

That's the challenge, Madam President and, step-by-practical-step, that should be our collective response.