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Security Council Debate
on
Women, Peace and Security

Statement
by
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to the United Nations

in Austria's capacity as
Chair of the Human Security Network

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Mr. President,

I am speaking today in Austria's capacity as current Chair of the Human Security Network, an interregional group of countries also comprising Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa as an observer, Switzerland and Thailand.

The aims of the Network are to increase awareness for human security at the political level, to add real value to the international debate, and to improve the implementation of existing standards in the field of human security through concrete actions. Putting security and the rights of the individual at the centre of policy shaping and energising political potential through its unique interregional perspective, the members of the Network are committed to strengthening human security with a view to creating a more humane world where people can live in security and dignity, free from want and fear, and with equal opportunities to fully develop their human potential. Promoting equal opportunities therefore is of central relevance to the members of the Human Security Network. The adoption of the UN SC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, in October 2000, was a landmark decision prompting HSN countries to work on the implementation of concrete measures to ensure that the needs of war affected women and girls are taken into account and that women are full and equal participants in all aspects of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. A concrete action undertaken in this field by the Network was the Workshop on Gendering Human Security, held in Oslo, Norway in January 2001.

The *Beijing Platform for Action* points out that "while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society as well as their sex." Women and men experience conflict differently: they play different roles in their communities, carry different responsibilities and often have different access to resources. The Security Council debates on Women, Peace and Security recognize the role of gender in armed conflict and the contribution of women to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, to peace building, to post-conflict reconstruction and to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his present report, which highlights a number of important aspects on the roles and experiences of women and girls in armed conflict and in its aftermath.

From the point of view of the Human Security Network, please allow me to briefly focus on a few issues in this regard:

1. Human Rights Education

The significance of human rights education was already clearly underlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, which stressed the need to raise awareness among women of their human rights and to raise awareness among others of the human rights of women. The present report of the Secretary-General recognizes the need for adequate training and education in several areas, including multidimensional peacekeeping operations as well as reconstruction and rehabilitation processes. Human rights education is one of the two priority issues of Austria's Chair of the Human Security Network, which will elaborate for its next Ministerial Meeting, in May 2003 in Graz, Principles on Human Rights Education and a manual on "Understanding Human Rights" containing substantive elements on the human rights of women.

2. The special needs of girls

The second priority of the Human Security Network this year is “children affected by armed conflict”, with a particular emphasis on the special protection needs of girls. A “Common HSN Support Strategy” is being developed involving an alarm function, support for monitoring activities and training of monitors and rehabilitation experts for children. We welcome the SG's recommendation to increase the number of programmes for child soldiers and to fully incorporate attention to the specific situation and needs of girl soldiers.

3. Protection of women from sexual exploitation and trafficking

The report of the SG reflects the grave consequences of violence, including sexual abuse, in the context of armed conflict on the physical and mental health of women and girls, such as the increased threat of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Therefore, we need to reiterate our call on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict. These forms of violence clearly undermine human security which to uphold is a fundamental aspect of peacekeeping operations. The Human Security Network welcomes efforts to strengthen early warning capacities in this respect, including concerning the trafficking in persons.

4. Protection of and Assistance to displaced women

Women and children constitute the vast majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons. As pointed out in the report of the SG, the differential impact of armed conflict and the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls can be seen in all phases of displacement. The Human Security Network therefore is committed to enhance the protection of and the assistance to displaced women during their displacement and upon their return to the communities of origin.

Today's debate provides an important opportunity to evaluate the impact of armed conflict on women and girls. We need to ensure that the security and the rights of women are protected, that any violations are prosecuted and that those responsible are brought to justice. But women are not only victims in situations of armed conflict. There are also many examples of women making a critical difference in the promotion of durable peace and in creating more equitable societies in the aftermath of conflicts. We therefore share the concerns of the SG that there is an urgent need to enhance the involvement of women in peace negotiations and their participation in UN peace operations. We will do our utmost to identify and nominate qualified women for upcoming vacancies in this regard. And we will actively support the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

Thank you, Mr. President.