

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security- 19 June 2008
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BENIN

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation congratulates the United States of America on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are particularly pleased, Sir, to see you presiding over this public debate.

If there is one area where the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) leaves most to be desired, it is that of the many forms of unconscionable violence and abuse which parties to armed conflict continue to inflict against women and young girls. This situation is in complete contravention of international standards. The most heinous and most traumatizing form of abuse against women is sexual violence. The seriousness of this abominable phenomenon is multiplied when it is perpetrated on a large scale. But all of that still does not compare to the use of mass rape as a weapon of war or as an instrument for ethnic cleansing or outright genocide.

The international community must acquire the means to gain access to the lawless regions where such crimes are committed and must carry out investigations of reported cases. In this context, the Council should be able to order special operations, by virtue of the principle of the responsibility to protect, in order to establish and document the involvement of armed groups committing sexual violence against women. Such investigations would aim also to determine the nature and the scope of the action to be taken to put an end to these criminal practices.

Synergy should also be established between the activities of human rights advisers, where they are deployed, and the monitoring and information mechanism established within the framework of resolution 1612 (2005), which was initiated by my country, Benin. This mechanism has been proven itself: it has enabled us to identify the perpetrators of abuse against children in situations of armed conflict.

Strengthening the legal provisions to fight impunity would be of great use, because the credibility of these provisions could serve as a deterrent to the parties to conflict. The International Criminal Court has a crucial role to play in this context.

At the same time, we must put an end to the stigmatization of women who are victims of rape and give them back their dignity by organizing awarenessraising campaigns and by establishing structures for psychological rehabilitation. This type of assistance to victims and to communities affected by armed conflict should be taken into account in the mandates of peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

In general terms, protection against sexual violence is an essential aspect of protecting civilians. United Nations missions should analyse such violence in order to define the concrete measures that can be taken to prevent sexual attacks. It nearly goes without saying that the deployment of women in the contingents would make the fight against

sexual violence more effective because it could facilitate contact and the gathering of sensitive information. But the absence of women in these contingents should not impede the development of effective strategies to counter this phenomenon.

While amnesty for warlords is often the price to pay in concluding peace accords, it is important to ensure that serious crimes not be covered up, as long as they are properly documented. These crimes should be made imprescriptible worldwide so that those who are suspected of having committed such crimes may be brought to account as soon as possible in an international or national jurisdiction as appropriate.

That said, we must enhance the awareness of law enforcement agencies on the issue of sexual violence to ensure that they effectively protect the population, because it is not rare for all parties to an armed conflict to be guilty of serious crimes against civilian populations — who are just as fearful of Government forces as of rebel forces.

The fight against sexual exploitation attributed to members of peacekeeping operations must be intensified. We must act more preventively than we have by improving the awareness of contingent members before they are deployed.

Care for victims of sexual violence is best provided by women and by women's civil society organizations. They should regard this as a field of action in which they have a clear comparative advantage. Their participation in negotiations to conclude and implement peace accords and to establish truth and reconciliation bodies would be an additional guarantee of the mainstreaming of gender-specific issues. They could also help to ensure that effective prevention policies are adopted.

In this context, my delegation believes that it is entirely appropriate for the Security Council to adopt a resolution on this issue on the basis of the draft text (S/2008/403) circulated by the United States as part of the preparations for this public debate. This initiative, as a whole, has the support of my delegation.

Last year, it was an honour for Benin to have contributed to bringing about consensus in the General Assembly on the resolution on rape (General Assembly resolution 62/134) that was initiated by the United States. The Security Council's adoption of this new draft resolution will give the United Nations the tools to ensure better monitoring of zones of conflict with a view to better protecting civilians.