

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
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Statement by H.E. Zacharie Gahutu, Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations

Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you for organizing this debate on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). I would also like to commend the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of the resolution (S/2010/498).

Throughout the many conflicts that Burundi has gone through, the people of Burundi have understood that the search for a viable and promising peace cannot be carried out by men alone but should also include women. Moreover, it has been well known for a long time in my country that women are the pillar of the family and therefore of society. When society is shaken by an armed conflict, its grisly effects inevitably have repercussions for women and their children.

Therefore, the women of Burundi have understood that they should play a role in the search for peace. Thus, since the crisis broke out in Burundi in 1993, women's organizations have become involved in bringing together different groups of the population who were sharply divided along political and ethnic lines in collaboration with local administrations.

During the same period, two decisive events were under way at the regional and international levels. The first was the Arusha negotiations, which gave the women of Burundi a seat at the negotiating table. The second was the period of the evolution of resolution 1325 (2000), here at the United Nations. Some observers, moreover, believe that the peace negotiation process in Burundi, which formally began in 1998, two years before the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), inspired many actors who, drawing on the lessons learned in Arusha, certainly helped to improve the text of the resolution. Consequently, the peace agreement signed by the protagonists in the Burundi conflict in August 2000 already contained a gender-specific dimension in some of its provisions and protocols.

On 31 October 2000, when resolution 1325 (2000) was solemnly adopted by the Security Council, Burundi was in a good position to implement it, given not only the experience that Burundian actors had recently acquired in Arusha and the backing of international organizations in the support of women of Burundi during the peace process, but also the challenges still to be tackled, in particular, agreeing on a ceasefire with the armed movements and the implementation of the gender-specific dimensions of the agreement.

Since 2005, Burundi has sought to give women an important role in managing public affairs. The unremitting struggle of the women of Burundi, together with the determination of the Government, made it possible to achieve the results that the whole world can see today in terms of the representation of women in decision-making bodies, both at the executive and the legislative levels. Indeed, after the elections this year, the women of Burundi have enjoyed a significant presence within decision-making bodies. They hold 32 and 44 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly and the Senate, respectively, and 42 per cent of the ministerial portfolios in the Government, including in the Ministry of Finance, Agriculture and Livestock Farming, Trade, Tourism and Industry, and Justice, and this is just to cite a few of the posts that have long been held by men.

In the judicial branch, there is a good level of representation of women in high offices. Three women in fact preside over the following higher courts: the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court. In a society characterized by male dominance in the highest State offices, those positions reflect an important change in terms of gender.

Turning to peacekeeping, it is important to emphasize that, at this time, the idea of having women in the police and army is socially accepted, even if their numbers have not reached those of women in other institutions. In our policy with regard to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, women have been included and benefit equally from this policy. Their specific needs are taken into account, be it through the assistance that has been granted, in the past, to former male combatants or through the integration of women into the national defence forces.

The question that remains crucial in Burundi is that of customary law and the access of women to property and inheritance. That issue has become a social concern that the Government of Burundi must address in order to align itself with the parliamentary debate convened in 2004, which resulted in a proposed draft law on succession, matrimony and rights. With the significant representation of women in the Parliament and the Government and with the determination of all of the actors in Burundi to fight against social inequality, there is hope that the new law will be promulgated after consultations among all actors.

In order to fully achieve the objectives of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), women in civil society, under the leadership of the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender and in partnership with United Nations agencies, have drawn up plan of action for resolution 1325 (2000) comprising eight pillars that outline the steps to take to make this resolution effective.

The topics promoted through these pillars are primarily participation, conflict prevention, protection against violence against women and children and community recovery. In terms of the latter, projects have already been carried out through the peacebuilding programme in the western part of our country, but, given the enormous needs in post-conflict reconstruction, gender-based projects need to be encouraged and established throughout the country.

In order to ensure that the participation of women becomes more active and grows, there are also the issues of strengthening their capacities and establishing a fund to ensure their continuous participation in various activities, so that they can take charge of their own destiny.

In this connection, during the Global Open Day for Women and Peace on 11 June 2010, the women of Burundi firmly recommended to the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General for Burundi the establishment of a basket fund that would facilitate the economic recovery of women in the context of post-conflict reconstruction.

In that respect, we welcome the creation of the new entity, UN Women, and given the enormous task facing its Director, Under-Secretary-General Bachelet, we hope that she will receive the sustained support of Member States, so that the new entity can respond to the expectations of women, who are only asking for access to resources. Once this has been achieved, the empowerment of women will have become a reality.