**Croatia on Women, Peace and Security
H. E. Vladimir Drobnjak, Ambassador Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia to the United Nations, UN Security Council Open Debate, 29 October 2003**

Mr. President,

I would like to start by commending the US presidency for raising the issue of the implementation of the Resolution 1325 in the open debate in the Security Council. It is important to proceed along the road paved by this Resolution and prove in practice that it remains an action oriented and results producing document.

The issue in front of us is as important as it is complex. One could approach it from various angles, yet still leaving many of the important parts untouched. As a country that not so long ago has been exposed to armed aggression and went through the horrors of war, Croatia gained a worthy know-how in some aspects of the field we are debating today. So let me briefly share with you a little of the Croatia's experiences and achievements on the matter.

The Government's Commission for Gender Equality - an intergovernmental commission entrusted to create policies and co-ordinate all activities for the promotion of gender equality at the local, regional and national levels - incorporated a chapter on Women and Armed Conflict in the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality for the period of 2001-2005 and its Implementation Program. Both documents were adopted by the Croatian Parliament in December 2001.

The following activities have been envisaged to be implemented by 2005: the Commission for Gender Equality in co-operation with other relevant institutions and organisations, especially NGOs, is going to continually inform women about the work of the International Criminal Court and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. It will educate women and children about land-mines and other types of explosive devices, secure the appropriate assistance to displaced persons, refugees and victims of the Homeland War, and participate in the implementation of measures aimed at simplifying their return and reintegration into society.

The Commission is also entrusted with the task of promoting participation of women in the activities associated with the maintenance of peace at all levels, enhancing knowledge of humanitarian law and human rights, and enabling greater representation of women in the bodies dealing with the defence policy and security issues of the Republic of Croatia.

Some tangible results have already been achieved in pursuing the goals set in the National Policy. It is not without content that I can inform you on the following:

• By the Defence Act, adopted in 2002, the Committee for Gender Equality was established within the Ministry of Defence. Today in the Croatian Ministry of Defense and in the Croatian Armed Forces about 15% of the workforce is women (this includes Minister of Defense herself, as well as one of the Assistant Ministers and the Secretary of the Ministry).

• As an integral part of the modernizing military education and training for armed forces, the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights subjects are included in the school curricula of the Croatian Military Academy. Special emphasis in teaching those subjects will be placed on the promotion and protection of women's human rights and introduction of measures aimed at combating violence against women in war, in armed conflicts and during post conflict transition.

• In July 2003 the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Law on Gender Equality that, inter alia, stipulates obligation for all state administration bodies and corporate entities with public competences to apply temporary special measures and adopt action plans for the promotion of gender equality, thus introducing the principle of gender mainstreaming into Croatian legislation.

With respect to Croatia's participation in peacekeeping missions, not only do we support incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping field operations, but we also implement this rule ourselves. Croatia contributed with four female officers within the German contingent of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. They successfully completed their assignment and now share their hard gained experience with other colleagues who are preparing for similar field posts. In addition to that, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that a captain of the Croatian Army is the first female army officer to take part in the Military Observer Mission in India and Pakistan.

Mr. President,

NGOs in Croatia play an active role in the promotion of women's roles in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building. They carry out various projects ranging from awareness-raising and capacity building activities aimed at the increase of women's representation at all decision making levels, to the specifically created activities in which NGOs assist women in the multi-ethnic areas and areas heavily damaged by armed activities. For the post-war confidence building process to become successful it is essential to include women as active participants in post-conflict reintegration and reconstruction. Croatia has gained a great deal of experience in this area and we stand ready to share it with others.
Women's protection in armed conflict and their fundamental role in conflict prevention and peace building can not be evaluated without taking into account that they are among those most affected by the violence and economic instability brought upon society by armed conflict. Yet, when it comes to negotiating peace, post-war reconstruction and reconciliation, women are still grossly underrepresented. Therefore we need to enhance the role of main bodies of the United Nations so they can streamline their efforts towards the empowerment of women. Strengthening the participation of women in the work of UNDP, UNFPA and UNIFEM could make a real difference on the ground - post conflict transition, recovery and reconstruction can not be fulfilled if gender equality and promotion of women's rights are absent.

Croatia welcomes increased involvement of women in peace keeping operations, especially among human rights and humanitarian personnel, military observers and civilian police. Along these lines we strongly encourage the practice of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the peacekeeping operations. At the same time we must strengthen our efforts to improve protection for women in armed conflict, parallel to the enhancement of their contribution to peace processes and in rebuilding their communities. As stated by the Secretary-General, "Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men."

We need to identify gender equality as an essential element for the realization of sustainable development at large, as it is an issue that cuts across all areas of development policy. Therefore, empowering women economically, especially through micro-finance, and making them part of the decision-making process in development policies is one of the prerequisites not only for economic and social prosperity, but also an important element for conflict prevention and peace-building.

Let me conclude by saying that although much has been done, we still witness continuous violence against women during conflict, women forced to flee their homes for the same reason, lack of health care and the accelerated spread of infections such as HIV/AIDS in conflict and post-conflict settings. We could easily present a long and sorrow list of facts about the terrifying impact of armed conflict on women. It goes without saying that we need to do more at international, regional and national levels. Our deliberations here today and constructive ideas are our joint efforts in this direction. It in encouraging to see the Security Council being engaged in this debate, and I use the opportunity to commend once again, the effort to convene and successfully organize this meeting.

Thank you Mr. President.