

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict-Affected Situations, October 18th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Medan, Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations

Croatia thanks Azerbaijan for convening this important debate on women, the rule of law and transitional justice in conflict-affected situations, an issue to which Croatia attaches great importance in the context of further advancing the women and peace and security agenda at the global, regional and national levels.

We welcome the report and recommendations of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2013/525), as well as resolution 2122 (2013), adopted today by the Council.

Croatia endorses the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add a few points in its national capacity.

In our view, ensuring gender equality is one of the basic principles with regard to respect for human rights. Transitions can present opportunities to strengthen women's rights, leadership and empowerment. It is crucial to put in place gender-responsive transitional justice measures as a key element in the processes of restoring the rule of law and governance systems in any conflict-affected situation.

Women ought to be placed at the heart of ongoing political, social and economic developments. Even though women are widely recognized as effective agents of peace, the number of women participating in decision-making in the area of peace and security remains unacceptably low. Ensuring their equal participation in decision-making is therefore essential for achieving sustainable peace and stability. In that context, we stress in particular the need to increase women's and girls' access to education. There can be no development and stability in any society, in particular war-affected and post-conflict ones, if girls and women have no access to education.

Owing to discriminatory legal frameworks and practices, women and girls are more vulnerable to conflict-related violations of their rights, including sexual violence. It is of vital importance that the culture of impunity that still prevails with regard to such crimes be addressed. Based on our own tragic experiences of the aggression on Croatia in the 1990s, during which rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror, we are convinced that the issue of sexual violence in conflict can be adequately addressed only through a comprehensive approach. In our view, victims' rights and access to reparations is one of the most gender-responsive transitional justice measures. The Croatian Government is currently preparing comprehensive legislation by which the survivors of sexual violence from the 1990s will be entitled to the status of civilian victims of war.

We also welcome the adoption of the resolution 2106 (2013), on strengthening of the prevention and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence, and support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. As a member of the group of global champions of the prevention of sexual violence initiative, Croatia will spare no effort to take a more prominent role in preventing and combating sexual violence in conflicts.

Despite all efforts, violence against women and girls still poses serious threats and has no borders or nationality. The recent adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty, with a binding criterion on gender-based violence, contributes to preventing the potential negative impact of international arms transfers on women and their rights. Croatia signed the Treaty in June, and is currently in the process of its ratification.

We believe that greater coordination and synergy among international partners would further improve the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on the ground.

Domestically, through its national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), Croatia has integrated a gender perspective into its foreign and security policy as well as its actions. We attach particular importance to the involvement of women in peacekeeping operations. Their presence reinforces women's perspectives, giving their initiatives more added value.

Female members of the Croatian Armed Forces involved in international assignments actively work as commanders, military observers and staff officers. We are particularly proud to state that, in coordination with NATO, in December we will deploy our first female general as gender adviser to the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. At the regional level, we strongly support the adoption of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe action plan on women, peace and security at the forthcoming ministerial meeting in Kiev.

In September, Croatia, as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, organized a high-level ministerial event with UN Women on women's economic empowerment for peacebuilding. The main rationale behind this event was to renew commitment and to sharpen the global focus on the role of women as agents of positive change and transformation in countries emerging from conflicts. We also wanted to invite the broader United Nations to boost women's economic rights as an essential contribution to peacebuilding.

In conclusion, Croatia will continue to give its full support to all aspects of the women, peace and security agenda.