



**STATEMENT BY**

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**TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE**

**ON**

**THE REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY  
COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325**

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Members of the Security Council,

President of the Security Council,

Excellencies,

Honourable Ministers and Delegates,

Mr. President,

I bring you warm salutations from the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the Security Council on the review of progress and implementation of UNSCR 1325.

No one can afford to ignore the challenges to peace and security that confront us all. That is why United Nations Security Council 1325, adopted in October 2000, is particularly relevant. It reaffirms women's role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. It also stresses the importance of their equal participation in efforts to maintain peace and security.

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth is an intergovernmental organisation of 53 independent states representing a third of the world's population. Member states work together to promote peace, democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and to fight poverty through economic and social development.

The Good Offices role of the Secretary-General, a long standing, "behind the scenes" mechanism for conflict prevention and peace building, was reinforced last year with the establishment of a Good Offices Section in the Secretariat's Political Affairs Division. In addition to serving as an early warning mechanism and putting forward measures for preventive action, the Good Offices Section co-ordinates a more integrated approach towards conflict situations, working in partnership with other organisations.

The Commonwealth addresses the root causes of conflict within its member states through its political, social, economic, and technical assistance programmes. Where conflict has occurred, the Commonwealth initiates peace building and recovery efforts in close cooperation with regional and international partners.

Using the Secretary-General's Good Offices, the Commonwealth has contributed to the stability and facilitated political progress in countries such as Cameroon, Fiji Islands, The Gambia, Guyana, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone,

Solomon Islands, Swaziland, and United Republic of Tanzania (Zanzibar). These activities include conflict prevention, the promotion of reconciliation and national peace building and efforts to strengthen justice, the rule of law, democratization, human rights, good governance and constitutional and judicial reform. We, like others, are concerned by the humanitarian situation in Uganda and, at the invitation of the Ugandan Government, are developing strategies and activities to work with partners to address this situation.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General's Good Offices work is supported by efforts of the Gender Section to mainstream a gender perspective into peace and conflict management processes. This role was reaffirmed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, last year, when they resolved to support capacity-building initiatives to prevent and resolve conflicts, and to ensure increased women's participation in peace processes.

In 1995, the Commonwealth adopted a Plan of Action among other things, to deal with the impact of conflicts on women, men and young persons, which was presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Building on past individual and collective initiatives within the Commonwealth, and taking into consideration recent global developments, the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women and Gender Affairs adopted a ten year Plan of Action, when they met in Fiji in May this year. In particular, this Plan of Action focuses on the impact of conflict and the importance of peace-building globally.

Mr. President,

In armed conflicts everywhere women and children are not mere "collateral casualties", but remain deliberate targets. They are often victims of sexual assault, rape, sex slavery, trafficking, forced prostitution, torture, abduction, etc. There is therefore a clear need for women to play a positive role in peace-building and conflict resolution and efforts must continue to ensure the gender dimension is built into these processes.

But women must be empowered socially and economically in order to play that role. Women should not be treated merely as victims of conflict, but must be treated as resourceful actors in all areas of peace building, negotiations, and conflict management. Member countries often do not provide women and young persons with the opportunities to participate in peace agreements, negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction and ignore issues that affect women and children such as lack of basic services, education, shelter, food security, gender justice, and reconciliation.

Despite these challenges, women in the Commonwealth and beyond play a crucial role in maintaining and rebuilding the social fabric during and in the aftermath of conflicts. Such laudable efforts include the initiatives of women from Papua New Guinea (Bougainville), Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone to mention a few.

In order to ensure that women play their rightful role in conflict resolution, the Commonwealth Secretariat has developed an integrated approach which involves men, women, and young persons in order to promote a culture of peace, resolve conflicts and increase women's representation and participation at all levels of peace building processes.

In Sierra Leone, for example, the Commonwealth supported the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its monitoring group (ECOMOG) to restore democracy in that country. In addition, it organised a National Consultation on "Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction" to help rebuild peace and democracy in Sierra Leone. We have also introduced programmes on education in conflict and difficult circumstances to the mainstream education system in Sierra Leone.

On the basis of the experience in Sierra Leone, the Commonwealth provided assistance to Sri Lanka to build the gender dimension into the country's programme for sustainable peace. Recently, the Commonwealth Secretariat also organised, in collaboration with regional partners, a Sub-Saharan Pan-African Ministerial conference focusing on programme strategies in Universal Primary Education in conflict affected countries. At the end of the meeting, Ministers issued the "Mombassa Declaration", urging governments to use education as a force for peace building, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and nation-building.

The Commonwealth has also used its comparative advantage in the area of education and HIV/AIDS. In collaboration with UNAIDS, the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted a global coalition initiative to promote the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) declaration to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Mr. President,

The challenge for the Commonwealth is to strengthen our support and partnership efforts with member countries and other stakeholders to help prevent and resolve conflicts before they translate into loss of lives and livelihoods. We must promote increased women's participation and representation in peace-building, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

We must help resolve conflicts through dialogue, promote a culture of peace and reconcile differences without loss of lives. As the Commonwealth Secretary-

General Rt. Hon. Don McKinnon noted, "conflict resolution is about battles that weren't fought, blood that wasn't spilled, children, women and men that didn't die."

Finally, preventing conflicts requires changing mind-sets, and it is only through education that fosters a culture of peace that we can prevent conflicts and mitigate their impact on sustainable development. We must strive to resolve conflicts through education, dialogue, and provide women with the necessary spaces for their voices to be heard and their contributions acknowledged. The positive contributions of women within the Commonwealth and globally can no longer be ignored. In the words of Honourable John Momis, the Governor of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea), "women are the unsung heroes of Bougainville (and elsewhere). I think it is about time that the world and the people of Bougainville appreciated the tremendous potentiality that is inherent in this (so called) weaker sex. In many, many ways, they are much, much stronger".

Mr. President,

I urge you today to celebrate these "unsung heroes" – women, whether from Bougainville, Fiji Islands, Uganda, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Afghanistan or elsewhere – by providing them essential spaces on all negotiating tables and continuing to make progress on this landmark resolution.

Thank you and I wish you successful deliberations.