

**Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820**

**Thursday, June 19, 2008**

***Statement by H.E Ms. Asba-Rose Migiros, Deputy Secretary-General to the United Nations***

Let me join the Secretary-General in commending the United States for its initiative to convene this very important meeting. I want to pay special tribute to you, Madam President, for your leadership and commitment in this regard.

Under the guidance of the Secretary-General, the United Nations has been vigorously working to prevent sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Just last month, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), on behalf of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, to which the Secretary-General has referred, hosted a high-level conference on the role of military peacekeepers and others in responding to this scourge. A number of former Force Commanders participating in that conference conceded that more needs to be done to protect women and children from widespread and systematic sexual violence in conflict situations. We are taking measures, conscious of the challenge we are facing in addressing the problem. The conference agreed that the credibility of peacekeeping operations ought to be measured by how successful they are in this respect, and it reached broad agreement on the fact that the profound insecurity perpetuated by sexual violence must be addressed at the political and tactical levels.

The adoption in 2000 of resolution 1325 (2000) demonstrated that sexual violence in conflict is not just a gender issue; it is a fundamental security concern. And the fact that the Security Council is holding this meeting today sends another clear signal that sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is within the remit of the Council.

That fact is critical to improving our operational approach. When the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo last December, it adopted strong language, setting a precedent for requiring specific responses to and reporting on sexual violence.

Gender units in most peacekeeping operations are working with key stakeholders, including uniformed peacekeeping personnel, national authorities, women's organizations and other sectors of civil society in efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence. All missions have underlined training as an important strategy to mobilize priority attention to this problem among peacekeeping personnel and national partners.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is undertaking numerous measures as well, including monitoring, investigating and documenting sexual and gender-based violence as a human rights issue.

These critical activities are part of our broader efforts to change attitudes to sexual and gender-based violence. This will require re-evaluating cultural practices and judicial systems to ensure that they are fully inclusive and that they guarantee the protection of women against all forms of abuse.

Sexual violence has not only grave physical, psychological and health consequences for its victims but also direct social consequences for communities and entire societies. Impunity for sexual violence committed during conflict perpetuates a tolerance of abuse against women and girls and leaves a damaging legacy by hindering national reconciliation.

Tackling this complex problem on all fronts will require the combined effort of all, including Governments, the United Nations System, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. In this regard, one of our greatest assets are women themselves. If we promote the full and equal participation of women in the security sector, we can ensure that security services effectively identify and respond to their needs.

The road ahead is long, but today's Council meeting is a crucial step forward. Let us maintain this forward momentum not only to protect women in conflict situations, but to secure lasting peace for all.