

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security**

**November 30th 2012, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Kolga Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations.*

First of all, I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Executive Director of UN-Women Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and Ms. Bineta Diop, the representative of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, for their presentations.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

Women have always played a unique role in preventing and in solving conflicts. However, it was only 12 years ago that a resolution adopted at the international level was dedicated solely to that issue. Today, 12 years after the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), further implementing the principles enshrined in the resolution remains a challenge in many parts of the world.

We welcome the focus of today's debate on the role of women's civil society organizations in contributing to the prevention and resolution of armed conflict and peacebuilding. As expressed in many statements made here today, Estonia, too, is of the firm opinion that the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) requires cooperation among all stakeholders: Member States, regional and international organizations and civil society. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) cannot be overestimated. What could international organizations or States accomplish if there were no support for such work on the ground? Not much, I assume. Nevertheless, in reality, the role of civil society organizations remains too often, if not for the most part, unrecognized.

We find it particularly pertinent to stress the value of engaging women's organizations and female community leaders in all aspects of conflicts, from prevention to post-conflict engagement. They are a crucial factor in securing the credibility and legitimacy of international efforts. We therefore deplore the fact that women human rights defenders so often become targets in conflicts. Ensuring their safety and opportunity to be heard is of the utmost importance.

Promoting the rights of women is one of the priorities of Estonia's foreign policy. In all aspects of that work, special attention is paid to the participation of women's NGOs in policymaking and peace processes. Estonia contributes to international military and civilian missions in countries where conflict resolution and peacebuilding are directly linked to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and where the inclusion of a gender dimension in the planning and implementation of missions will enhance the efficiency of international efforts. Estonia intends to take on even greater responsibilities, and my country is proud to have been elected a member of the Human Rights Council for the next term, 2013-2015. I can guarantee that one of our top priorities as a member of that Council will be the promotion of women's rights and participation.

There is a growing understanding that women and children are impacted uniquely and disproportionately by the effects of conflicts and their aftermath. Estonia has focused its development cooperation as well as its humanitarian assistance and human rights activities on supporting those vulnerable groups. We therefore regularly contribute to international programmes and funds, including UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In fact, Estonia is proud to announce that it is significantly increasing all of its voluntary contributions to United Nations agencies in 2013.

We welcome the fact that, at the national level, the number of countries that have given priority to women and peace and security through national action plans has continued to grow, and that 37 Member States have already adopted national action plans. Estonia adopted its national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in 2010 and has since shared its process of preparing an action plan with other countries. One of the most important conclusions of our 2011 implementation report is that NGOs play a crucial role in furthering the agenda of resolution 1325 (2000). The cooperation between the public sector and NGOs is crucial in that regard.

Estonia welcomes the important steps taken in that area within the framework of the United Nations in the past two years. However, the fact that, according to the Secretary-General's report entitled "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" (A/66/81), only four of the United Nations negotiating party delegations out of the 14 peace processes under way in 2011 included a woman delegate, which shows

that there is still a lot of room for improvement. We would therefore encourage taking steps to ensure the inclusion of women in the ongoing peace processes. In a similar vein, it is regrettable that, in 2011, out of the nine peace agreements signed only two contained women and peace and security provisions.

We fully agree with the Secretary-General that the gender dimensions of mediation should be clearly and consistently articulated. Indeed, it is important to raise gender-specific issues from the onset of the conflict analysis phase and during the earliest moments of the peace negotiations. That can help ensure that provisions dealing with gender equality are included in peace accords.

We are deeply concerned that, according to the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2012/732), sexual violence and the threat of sexual violence continue to be employed as weapons of war in a range of conflicts. In some cases, even an increase of incidents was reported in 2011. Sexual and gender-based violence are gross human rights violations that are present in every armed conflict. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to educate and engage men and boys to be active participants in preventing sexual violence.

Estonia remains concerned about the lack of accountability for those who have committed gross violations of human rights. In that context, we would like to stress the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC), a significant actor in the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of international concern committed against women and girls. We welcome the principles set out in the ICC's first-ever decision on reparations, in particular the confirmation that the needs of vulnerable victims — including women, children and victims of sexual and gender-based violence — must be addressed as a priority. Reparations can be used as a vehicle to empower women and girls and to address gender inequality, one of the root causes of violence against women.

As a member of the UN-Women Executive Board — which plays a significant role in contributing to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) — and of the Commission on the Status of Women, we support the objective of empowering women in society. We fully agree with the Secretary-General that translating norms into practice must, in the end, be measured against real change in the lives of women, girls, boys and men across the continuum from conflict to peace.

Finally, we have noted that, according to the data published in the Secretary-General's report, the information flow to the Security Council and the Council's response to women and peace and security concerns continue to be uneven, and we would like to encourage the Council to pay greater attention to the matter. In that regard, today's debate is a very good example of affording the question of women and peace and security the consideration it deserves.